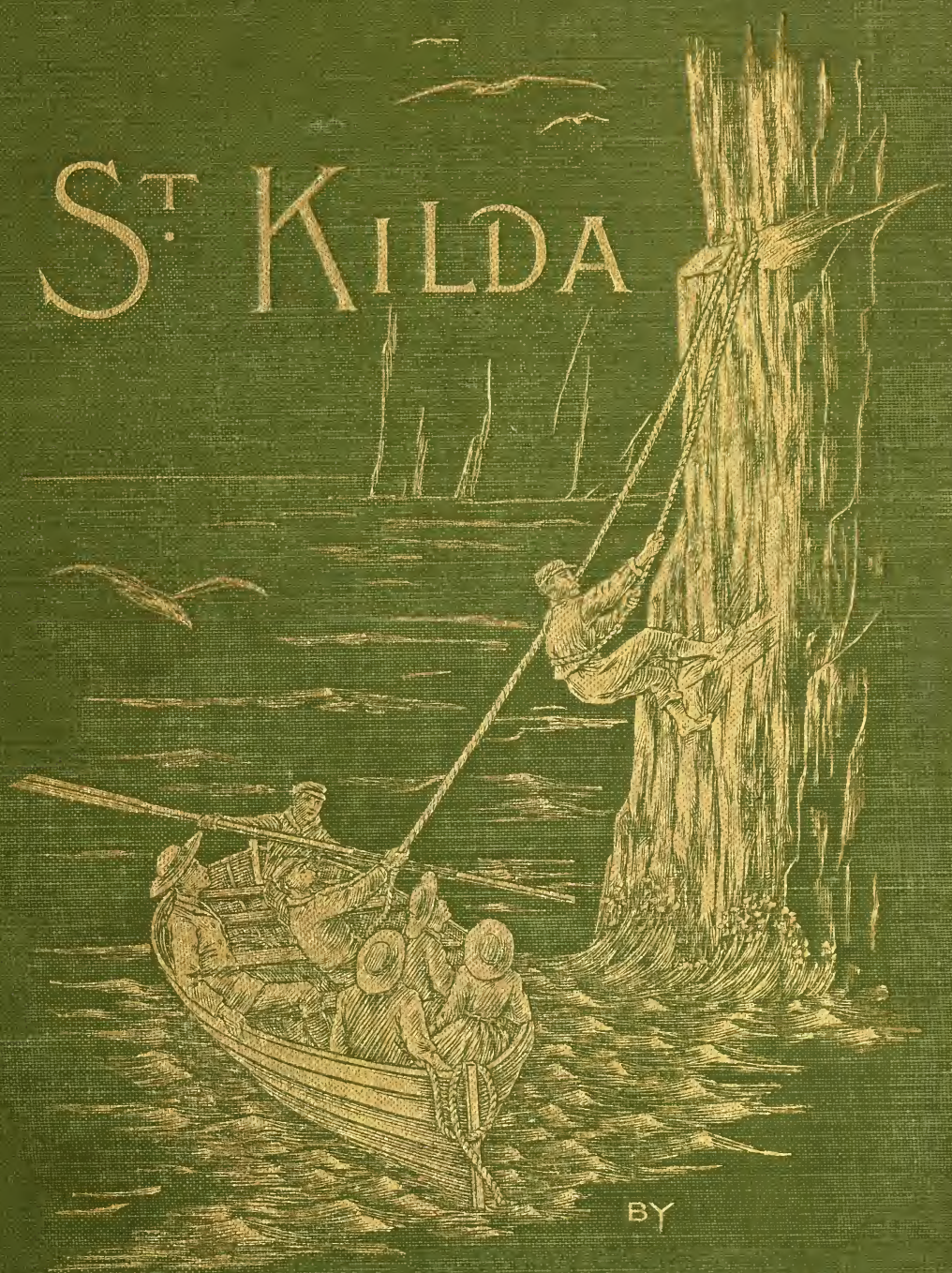


ST KILDA



BY

Norman Heathcote.



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CLASS OF 1937, L.H.D. (HON.) 1980
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ST. KILDA



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Where the Fulmars breed.

ST. KILDA

BY

NORMAN HEATHCOTE



*WITH 80 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SKETCHES AND
PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PEOPLE, SCENERY,
AND BIRDS BY THE AUTHOR*

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

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PREFACE

So much has already been written about St. Kilda that I suppose I should apologise for adding yet another book on the subject, but I believe a good many people take an interest in the little island, the most remote corner of the British Isles, and as I have had exceptional opportunities of studying the people, and obtaining illustrations of the scenery and birds, I venture to hope that my book may not be *de trop*.

More than two hundred years have elapsed since Martin published the first book about St. Kilda. Dr. Johnson condemned this work in most scathing terms, and was much more complimentary in his criticism of Kenneth Macaulay's treatise which appeared in his own day. Personally, I think Mr. Martin's book the better of the two, so I am thankful that there is no Dr. Johnson to criticise my first literary effort. The most comprehensive work on the subject is Mr. Seton's "St. Kilda," and the most interesting account of the place appeared in Mr. Kearton's "With Nature and

a Camera.' The former spent only a few hours on the island, and his information is mainly derived from other authors ; the latter is concerned principally with ornithological matters. I have attempted to give my own impressions of anything concerning the island or its inhabitants that seemed likely to be of general interest, but have avoided, as far as possible, repeating what has already appeared in print.

It is perhaps presumption on my part to publish photographs of birds in a place which has already been exploited by so successful a photographer as Mr. Kearton, especially as I only had a small hand-camera to work with, and it is downright impudence to presume to illustrate St. Kilda with the brush after reading the statement that only the hand of a Turner could do justice to the grandeur of the scenery, so I must ask the reader to make allowances for the imperfections of the camera, and still more for the inefficiency of the artist, and trust that in spite of all defects the book may be of interest to the public.

I am indebted to the Royal Geographical Society for permission to publish the map. I may, without presumption, claim that this is the best map of St. Kilda in existence. It is practically the only one. Martin published what he is pleased to call a map

of the place, but it has every appearance of having been drawn at home from memory, and the same might be said of Macaulay's. Wilson made some attempt to make a survey of the island, but the result is not much more accurate than the previous attempts, and the St. Kilda group appears so small in the Admiralty Chart that it is not of much practical use. I have had no experience of surveying in the field, but having plenty of time, and having spared no pains to rectify errors and overcome difficulties, I succeeded at last in producing a fairly satisfactory result.



YOUNG GANNETS

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ST. KILDA

CHAPTER I

ST. KILDA IN THE PAST



TO people living in the midst of the turmoil and bustle of a London life, it seems almost incredible that there should be a place within the confines of the British isles where not only is there no telegraph or railway, but not even a road or a horse; where the inhabitants have no conception what a town is like, and have never seen anything in the

shape of a tree or shrub ; an island fifty miles from the nearest land, having no communication with the outer world except during the three months of summer ; an island of towering precipices surrounded by the relentless waves of the Atlantic, where no sound is heard except the cry of a seagull and the roar of the breakers on the rocks ; where drunkenness and crime are unknown, where no policeman has ever been seen, and a doctor rarely comes.

Yet such a place is St. Kilda.

When we had made up our minds to pay a visit to this *Ultima Thule* ("we" refers to my sister and myself), and I began to talk about our project to my friends and acquaintances, I found that people displayed varying degrees of ignorance about the subject. Nearly all had heard of such a place, a good many knew that it was an island somewhere off the coast of Scotland, but very few knew more than this, though they were quite prepared to talk as if they did. One said, "Oh yes ! St. Kilda ! my father used to go there to shoot." This, to say the least of it, was improbable. Another said, "Well, I expect I have seen it, because I have yachted a good deal on the West Coast ;" while a lady, on hearing that it



A MOONLIGHT EXPEDITION

was a great place for birds, declared that she had an ornithological friend who must have been there, apparently for no other reason than that she was ornithological—not very conclusive evidence. I had long wanted to bring off this expedition, and when I suggested to my sister that we might manage it in the summer of 1898, our plans were soon settled. Our determination was greeted by a howl from our friends. They said, “Oh! you’ll never get there; the steamer won’t be able to land passengers, and, after being frightfully ill on the way out, you will be obliged to come back, having had all the discomfort and expense of the journey for nothing.” Then they pointed out the misery of sleeping in a house destitute of beds, the difficulty of getting food, the probability of our breaking our necks or getting drowned, and the chance of being unable to get away again, and having to spend months, perhaps a whole year, on the island. However, none of these arguments had the slightest effect, and we started.

We knew that the Highland steamers on the occasions of their St. Kilda trips were sure to be crowded with tourists, but we had not expected to have the company of any “Sassenachs” after the

Dunara Castle had left us on the island. However, there was a regular invasion of the place, the population being temporarily augmented by something like twenty souls, some on pleasure,



OUR HOUSE

some on business bent. As we were going to occupy the only vacant house, it seemed somewhat of a problem where they would all sleep, and we expended a good deal of pity on two young Englishmen who had rashly neglected to inquire about accommodation, and talked about



MY BEDROOM

sleeping in a tent. John Mackenzie, jun., who goes to St. Kilda every year in his capacity of factor or agent for the owner, MacLeod of MacLeod, assured us that no tent could stand against the squalls that come down off the hills, and from what we experienced afterwards I can quite believe it. However, they did not have occasion to put it to the test, as they got lodgings in a native cottage.

The business contingent of the invaders consisted of masons and carpenters going to build a schoolhouse. I believe most of these spent the first night on the rocks. This sounds most inhospitable on the part of the natives, but the fact is, it was Saturday evening when we arrived. At first sight this does not seem a very sufficient reason, but in many parts of Scotland, and in St. Kilda especially, it is held to be a deadly sin to do any work after midnight on Saturday. As on this occasion it was impossible to land all the goods without desecrating the Sabbath, the St. Kildans left the foreigners to complete the work, and made no arrangements about their accommodation.

All naturalists have heard of St. Kilda, and Mr. Kearton, who went there in 1896, has made

it familiar to all sorts and conditions of men, but for the benefit of those who have not read, "With Nature and a Camera," I may as well state that



LANDING STORES

it is an island, or rather group of islands, lying about fifty miles west of the Sound of Harris in the Outer Hebrides.

The main island, formerly called Hirta, is about ten miles in circumference, and the subsidiary islands, Soay and Boreray, about a third of that size. Dùn is separated from Hirta by a narrow channel, but can be reached at low water without a boat. There are also several isolated rocks called "Stacks." It is unnecessary to enter into further particulars, as the geography of the group can be better understood by reference to the map at the end of the volume.

It has been suggested that the name *Hirta* was derived from a Gaelic word meaning "Earth," the idea being that the St. Kildans, finding themselves lords of all they surveyed, called their island by the most impressive title they could think of; or else that the first comers, arriving at St. Kilda after a long sea-voyage, were so pleased at seeing land that they shouted out "Earth, earth!" in the same way as the soldiers under Xenophon cried *Θάλασσα, Θάλασσα*, when they came in sight of the sea. The true derivation is from *h-Iar-tir*, meaning "the West Country."

The origin of the word *St. Kilda* is more doubtful. Martin derives it from one "Kilder" who lived there, but he does not say who "Kilder" was, when he lived, or why the island should

have been named after him. Kenneth Macaulay, great-uncle of the historian, after rejecting Martin's hypothesis, and one or two equally improbable solutions, comes to the conclusion that it is the English form of *Cheile-Dé-Naomh* (the Island of the Holy Culdee). This derivation has been supported by modern authorities, but it does not seem to me very satisfactory; and I think that a suggestion made by Dr. MacPhaill, whom we met in St. Kilda last summer, is much more probable. The natives of the present day pronounce *r* like *l*, so Hirta becomes Hilta, or almost Kilta, as the *h* has a somewhat guttural sound. Granted that this peculiarity of pronunciation was in vogue two hundred years ago (a by no means improbable assumption, as Martin mentions that they had a curious lisp in their speech), it is obviously easy to transform Kilta into St. Kilda.

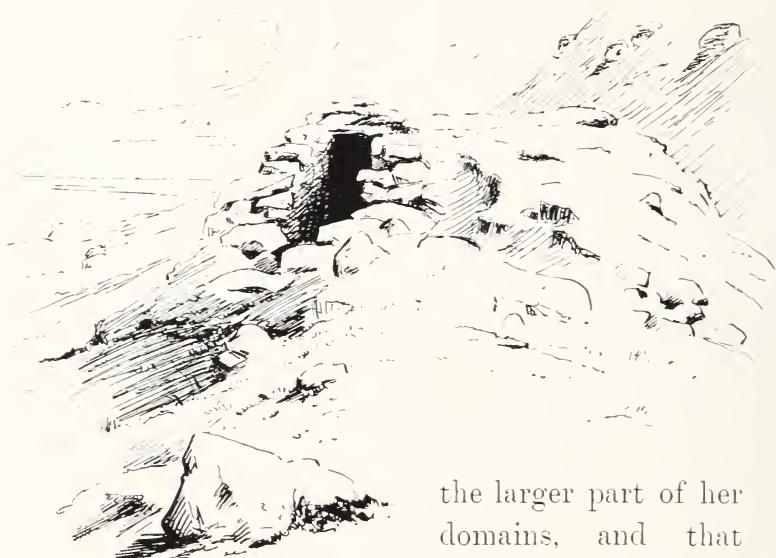
The earliest mention made of the island is in a charter granted by John, Lord of the Isles, to his son Reginald, and confirmed by King Robert II. about the middle of the fourteenth century. There is some doubt as to how and when it came into the possession of the MacLeod family, but according to a manuscript history of the MacDonalds, it was Godfrey, Reginald's elder brother,

who "gave Boysdale to MacNeill of Barra, and gifted Hirta to the Laird of Harris," *i.e.* MacLeod. As Godfrey died before the end of the fourteenth century, the MacLeods must have been in possession of St. Kilda at least five hundred years ago.

There is no doubt that it was inhabited long before that, but as there is nothing to show who were the first inhabitants or how they got there, one must either pass the subject by without remark, or make a guess. I prefer to make a guess.

There is a legend that St. Kilda was not always an island, and that a lady known as the Warrior Queen had the right of hunting deer on the land between Hirta and Harris. In proof of this the St. Kildans of Martin's time pointed to a pair of antlers that were found buried in the ground on Oiseval, as the hill which rises at the back of the village is called, and showed him the lady's house situated near the "Well of Virtues" at the bottom of the "Female Warrior's Glen." Now, the fact that this region was at one time dry land is confirmed by geological theories, but as it is hardly conceivable that the inhabitants of a remote island two hundred years ago should have had any knowledge of geology, it seems to me not

impossible that the legend is founded on fact, and that St. Kilda was inhabited before it was separated from the mainland. It may be that the Warrior Queen was hunting on the mountains at the time when the sea rushed in and flooded



THE WARRIOR QUEEN'S HOUSE

the larger part of her domains, and that being thus imprisoned on the newly-formed

island she was forced to stay there, and live as best she could on her diminutive kingdom. I do not profess to maintain that this is very probable, but it seems to me rather an attractive idea, and is not much more unlikely than the story told by Martin of the race for possession of the

island between the inhabitants of Uist and Harris, the latter winning by one of them chopping off his hand and throwing it ashore over the heads of his antagonists. This story may have been invented to account for the ownership of St. Kilda



THE RACE FOR THE ISLAND

by the MacLeods, and appears also to have been confused with the adventures of Coll Ciotach.

This gentleman was a MacDonald of Colonsay, and was of an adventurous and even piratical turn of mind. Rory Mor, thirteenth chief of MacLeod, relates how he raided St. Kilda in A.D. 1156,

“and coming to the ylle, they slew all the bestiall of the ylle, both cowes and horses and sheep, and took away all the spoolyee of the ylle, onlie reserved the lyves of the enhabitants.”

The spelling seems a little odd, but I suppose it is really rather good for a Highlander of the seventeenth century. The same Coll, having carried his predatory habits rather too far some years later, selected St. Kilda as a place of refuge. The inhabitants were a bit shy of him at first, but he succeeded in pacifying them, and they entertained him in safety on their island for some time. I suppose such a forgiving spirit is praiseworthy, but it would have been no more than he deserved if they had pitched him into the sea.

He was called Ciotach, the left-handed, because he had lost his right hand on one of his marauding expeditions, and this accounts for his name having been introduced into the legend of the race for St. Kilda, which, of course, must have occurred long before the seventeenth century.

There are several underground houses still to be found in St. Kilda. One of these, situated near the village, has been partially excavated, and yielded various trophies in the way of earthenware vessels, spear-heads, &c., some of which have been

identified as belonging to the Viking age. This proves that St. Kilda was inhabited at least a thousand years ago, but it seems to me also to indicate earlier occupation, as this was not the sort of house patronised by the Norwegian pirates, and must have been either made at that time as a retreat from the invaders, or was the form of house used by the St. Kildan aborigines.

These subterranean dwellings are similar to the Pictish houses found on the Long Island, in the Orkneys, and elsewhere, and were probably the form of house occupied by the natives who were driven out by the Picts. The house of the Female Warrior was a more pretentious building, not entirely subterranean, but it was of the same character, built in the simplest manner, with overlapping stones, the walls enormously thick, and the only sleeping accommodation consisting of hollows formed in the thickness of the walls. The fact that neither this place nor a similar but even larger dwelling, known as the Stallir's House on Boreray, have as yet been molested by the pickaxe and shovel of the archaeologist, testifies to the inaccessibility of St. Kilda.

If there is any truth in my theory of the

Warrior Queen, the first inhabitants of Hirta would have found their way there during the period succeeding the glacial epoch, while all this tract was still dry land, and the legend of how they got there would be handed down from one generation to another. Of course, the house that they now point out as the dwelling-place of their renowned Amazon may be of much later date than the lady herself, and the stories which Martin says were current in his time about her, but which he unfortunately does not record, may have been improvised or added to by the imaginative narrator, but I do not think that it is the sort of legend that would be invented *in toto*.

A circle of large stones that used to exist on Boreray rather points to the presence of Druids in the island at some time, but whether they were arranged with a view to Druidical worship or not, their undoubted antiquity seems to confirm the theory of the early occupation of St. Kilda. There are other relics of pagan times in the shape of altars in several parts of the islands. I am not sufficiently learned in archæology to form any opinion about those altars, but one may feel pretty sure that the one on Soay, of which I give a photo, is not a cairn put up for surveying

purposes, because the place has never been surveyed; nor can it have been built for fun by the enterprising tourist, because no tourist has ever landed on Soay.

The wall separating the eastern peak of Dùn from the rest of the island is another monument



ANCIENT ALTAR ON SOAY

of prehistoric times. *Dun* means fort, and so we may assume that the place derived its name from the fortress at the end of it. In the last century it was called "Dun Fir-Bholg," and

Macaulay talks a lot of nonsense about Volsci and Fir-Bholgs, finishing up by saying that the fort was built of hewn stones of a different character to any in the neighbourhood. This seems to be fairly conclusive evidence that he never visited the spot, as the wall, though wonderfully well

built, is made entirely from stones picked up on the spot and not fashioned in any way.



REMAINS OF OLD FORT ON DÛN

It seems probable that St. Kilda was Christianised at an early date. One of the chapels described by Martin was dedicated to St. Brendan, an Irish

saint, who spent several years, in the fifth century, sailing about among the islands of the western seas, and it is quite possible that he may have visited Hirta during his proselytising journeys. Another chapel, dedicated to St. Columba, points to its having been brought under the influence of the monks of Iona ; but this is only conjecture.

One tradition relates that the first inhabitants came from Ireland under the leadership of a man named Macquin, but I do not know that there is any confirmation of this except that the name MacQuien always has been, and is still, common on the island.

Whoever the original inhabitants may have been, there is little doubt that the present St. Kildans are not descended from them. The population has varied considerably from time to time. Martin found 180, Macaulay 88; at the first Government census in 1851 there were 110, now there are 70. This fluctuation in numbers may be accounted for by the fact that on more than one occasion the place has been partially or completely depopulated. A tale is told how two men named Dugan and Ferchar plotted to kill all the inhabitants. Having induced them to take sanctuary in the church by a false alarm of the approach of a fleet of men-of-war, they set fire to the building. Under the impression that all had perished, they looked forward to being the sole possessors of the island, but retribution came with the arrival of a boat in spring, when an old woman, who had escaped from the fire and concealed herself in a cave, came forward and was able to convict the

ruffians of their treachery. It is always one old woman who escapes on these occasions, though it is difficult to see why, unless it is that she is more likely to be able to fly up the chimney on a broomstick. In a similar contingency, when the MacDonalds set fire to a church in which a large body of MacLeods were assembled, one old woman was the only survivor. She also brought retribution on the aggressors, as she gave the alarm at Dunvegan, and the MacLeods, falling upon their foes while they were rejoicing over their treacherous victory, slew them to a man. The bodies were ranged alongside a stone wall, which was then overturned on the top of them, wherefore the engagement is called "the battle of the wall" unto this day.

To return to my St. Kilda story. The villains were left to select their own mode of death, one on Stac Lii, the other on Soay; the old woman was carried off to Skye, and the island was left desolate. One of the natives, in telling this story, after describing the burning of the church, &c., said "and then a steamer came into the bay"—a somewhat glaring but not unnatural anachronism. They have no idea how long steamers have been invented or how long ago such an episode was

likely to have taken place. We are not told how St. Kilda was repeopled, but probably the MacLeods could always lay their hands on a certain number of individuals whom they were glad to get out of the way ; in fact, there seems no doubt that they used the place as a private penal settlement. The most notable instance of this is in the case of Lady Grange.

Her tragic fate is sufficiently well known, at least that is what I have found stated in books, but as I have come across many people who have never heard of her or her fate, I am going to tell the story once more. Lord Grange was the younger brother of the Earl of Mar, who was outlawed for the part he played in the rising of 1715. He himself took no part in the rebellion, and rose to be a judge on the Scottish bench. He professed to be a zealous Presbyterian and a devoted adherent of the House of Hanover, but his own letters and contemporary records prove him to have been a hypocrite, whose main object always was to look after the interests of Lord Grange. His wife was the daughter of Chiesly of Dalry, who assassinated the Lord President of the Court of Session in the streets of Edinburgh. Some portion of her father's

violent temper seems to have descended to the daughter, and this, added to habits of intemperance resulting in partial insanity, rendered her anything but a congenial consort. After twenty years of wedded life they were formally separated in A.D. 1730, but according to Lord Grange's own account she would not leave him in peace. He writes: "You will remember with what lying impudence she threatened Lord Grange" (he always writes thus of himself in the third person) "and many of his friends with accusations of high treason and other capital crimes, and spoke so loud of her accusing directly, by a signed information to Lord Justice Clerk, that it came to his ears and she was stopt by hearing he said that if the mad woman came to him he would cause his footman to turn her downstairs. What effect her lies may have where she is not so well known, and with those who from opposition to what Lord Grange is about may think their interest to encourage them, one cannot certainly know, but if proper measures be not fallen on against it the creature may prove troublesome."

He appears not to have fallen on the proper measures for nearly two years, but on the evening of January 22, 1732, Lady Grange was seized

by a party of Highlanders and carried off to the North, and nothing more was heard of her for nearly ten years. It was given out that she had died suddenly, and though some of her friends seem to have known that she was not dead, no one had any idea of her actual fate. That such a thing should be possible shows what a wild place Scotland was at that time, and how powerful and independent the chiefs must have been. According to Lady Grange's own account, some retainers of the notorious Simon, Lord Lovat, under the command of Roderick MacLeod, were the direct agents in carrying her off. Lord Lovat denies that he had anything to do with it, but a denial from a man of his character is not worth much, and though he did not appear personally, it is probable that he designed the whole affair.

She was tied to a man on horseback, securely gagged, and, riding only at night, was conveyed to the house of a member of the Stewart clan. After being kept a close prisoner in a room with boarded-up windows and an "ugly old bed without a roof," her health began to give way, and she was soon afterwards removed to the Highlands. For about two years she lived on a small island named Hesker, belonging to Sir

Alexander MacDonald, but whether this chieftain refused to have any more to do with the business, or whether it was thought desirable to remove her to a still more secluded prison, the fact remains that about this time she was handed over to the custody of MacLeod of MacLeod, Lord Lovat's nephew. In one of the "wicked Simon's" letters we read, "MacLeod is a most excellent gentleman, full of honour and honesty," but in the MacLeod family he is always referred to as "the wicked man," and his treatment of poor Lady Grange was by no means the worst of his sins.

There are several dungeons in Dunvegan Castle, and in one of them it is said that he shut up his wife, of whom he wanted to be rid in order that he might marry another lady. The poor prisoner died conveniently soon, and he was able to carry out his wish.

This "excellent gentleman," who had some experience in the imprisonment of wives, transported Lady Grange to St. Kilda. In a letter dated St. Kilda, January 20, 1738, she writes, "I was in great misery in the Husker, but I am ten times worse and worse here." In the same letter she says, "You know I'm not guilty of any

crime except that of loveing my husband to much. He knowes very well that he was my idol, and now God has made him a rode to scourgeth me ; if friends cannot prevail with Lord Grange, then let me have the benefit of the law. It is impossible for me to write, or for you to imagine all the misserie and sorrow and hunger and cold and hardship of all kinds that I have suffered since I was stolen ; if my paper allowed me I would give a particular account of the way, but I must be short and I have a bad pin." Poor lady ! Even the trouble of a bad pen would not be easily remedied in St. Kilda.

The house where she lived on St. Kilda was pulled down some years ago, but the descendants of the people who attended her are still living on the island. It is said that she never slept at night, and spent the greater part of the day weeping, or writing letters which she wrapped up in pieces of yarn and committed to the sea in bits of cork or bottles. She succeeded at last in persuading the minister to take a letter to her friends, but his courage failed him before he had carried out his purpose, and he declared that he was in such fear for his life that he burnt her papers. However, a letter did finally reach her

friends, and on January 17, 1741, Lord Grange writes, in answer to a communication from Thomas Hope of Rankeillor, her legal adviser: "I wish you had advised with these gentlemen (lawyers) sooner, for they would have advised you at least



VIEW IN VILLAGE BAY

to write to me before that by your means (I know none else who would or could done it) strange stories were spread over all the town of Edinburgh and made the talk of coffee-houses and tea-tables. I am willing to impute this to your want of consideration, for it's very injurious to me

and my children, and the welfare of the person you say you have so much regard for could not have prompted a considerate man to take such a course."

He never refers to Lady Grange by name: it is always "she" or "that person," but he seems to have been considerably disturbed by the discovery of his plot. He writes pages and pages in trying to justify his conduct, complains how she cried and raged against him in the streets, how she threatened to attack him on the bench, which made his duty there very heavy on him, explains that "the person has always been under such direction and care as her friends could trust themselves, and that an allowance plentifully sufficient for all her wants has been duly paid," and finally appeals to him not to take judicial proceedings, as in that case he would have to defend himself and bring to light many things that would be better buried in oblivion. To this Mr. Hope replies: "I own I have expressed myself on several occasions and do still think that the carrying off that unfortunate lady in so violent a manner was cruel and barbarous"—a sentiment with which, I think, every one will agree; but he admits that "she should have been placed somewhere that she could have given no disturbance to you

or your family," which proves pretty conclusively that she was of unsound mind. However, the reference Lord Grange makes to the damage her statements might do to him, and the fact that so many Highland chiefs, who were all more or less engaged in Jacobite plots, were ready to take charge of her, rather points to Lord Grange having other reasons than her madness for getting her out of the way.

Several accounts are given of her ultimate fate, most of them probably concocted at the "coffee-houses and tea-tables" that his Lordship refers to. One story has it that her friends fitted out a ship and went to St. Kilda to rescue her, but on arriving there found Lady Grange in her grave, and the minister would not say how she died. This rather smacks of the coffee-house. Another account says that one of her letters was intercepted by the MacLeods, and that before her friends could rescue her she was hurried away to Sutherlandshire, where she died. Probably what really happened was that the representations of her friends induced Lord Grange to have her removed from St. Kilda, but she was kept in restraint either in Assynt or Harris till 1745, when she died. She was buried at Trompan, near Dunvegan, where the bill for her funeral expenses still exists. Here is a facsimile of it:—

1. Recd. for the hon. Norman Macleod of Macleod the sum of
 £100 00
 By Cash from Macleod's Receipt. £12, 00, 00
 By Do. from Wm. James upon
 Macleod's Recd. £21, 16, 03
 By Macleod's order upon pay
 for the balance being £21, 09, 02
 £53, 05, 05
 Donegan 16 August 1745
 The above Recd. is filled & cleared with law
 & order of Comptrolr & accepted by
 J. D. M. H. H. H.

To are particular Recd. of
 expenses in Lady Grange's
 interment of £30, 15, 00
 Do. her board &c. for three
 months at £2, 10, 00
 £32, 05, 05

BILL FOR LADY GRANGE'S FUNERAL EXPENSES

The poor lady was not very well treated in her lifetime, but she must have had a splendid funeral—£30 would go a long way in whisky. Does it not seem monstrous that the cost of her burial should be greater than her keep for a year?

Another instance of the depopulation of St. Kilda occurred early in the last century when the island was visited by an epidemic of smallpox. All the adult inhabitants died, with the exception of a few who had been left on Boreray at the time when the disease broke out. As there is no place on Boreray where it is possible to beach a boat, their custom is, when anything has to be done there, to land the party on the island and come for them again in the course of a few days. The vessel bringing the infection arrived during their absence, and as there was no one left on Hirta capable of manning a boat, they had to remain where they were from the middle of August until the steward's boat came in the following May. It was undoubtedly preferable to dying of smallpox, but it cannot have been a very enviable experience. There is not a level spot on the island; they had nothing to eat except sheep and birds, nothing but a wretched hovel to sleep in, and they could

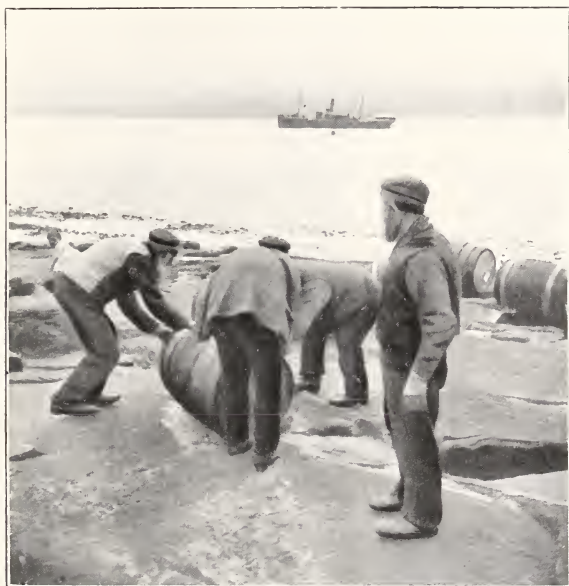
have had no means of knowing the real reason of their abandonment.

Apparently at one time they were in the habit of keeping their boat with them, as Martin relates how, on one occasion, when all the men were in Boreray, the rope by which their boat was fastened broke, with the result that she was cast adrift and lost. In order to let the womankind at home know that there had been no loss of life, they lit as many fires as there were men on the island, and the women, who immediately understood the meaning of the signals, were so pleased at learning that all were alive, that they set to and dug up the soil with the spade, to such good purpose that the crops that year were better than they had ever been before.

Events of importance are not of frequent occurrence in the history of St. Kilda. The arrival of the birds in spring and the advent of the steamers are occurrences of the first magnitude in the eyes of the natives; but they are of less importance to other people and need not be chronicled. Such an epoch-making event as a wreck on their coasts occurs much less frequently than one might expect; the island does not lie in the track of ships, and being a small place, with deep water

all round and hardly any sunken rocks, it is not really a dangerous coast.

Crews of vessels wrecked on St. Kilda have been invariably well treated, and the natives have shared with them their small stock of provisions,



ARRIVAL OF THE STEAMER

though the addition of a lot of hungry men to the population might well be a serious matter in times of scarcity, and in former days such times were not unknown. Early in this century the minister wrote in his diary that they cleared

the shore of shell-fish and scraped the seaweed off the rocks, and elsewhere he says "their principal food is sorrel," a diet with which the most enthusiastic vegetarian would hardly be content.

On several other occasions messages from the sea have announced that the St. Kildans were in danger of starvation, and though these stories were generally found to be exaggerated, there is no doubt that the inhabitants were liable to run short of provisions. Mr. Sands says, "They are not unfrequently brought face to face with famine." Seeing that there are at least 1000 sheep on the island and an unlimited supply of fish in the sea, it is difficult to see how they could ever be in serious danger of starvation. They might run short of meal and potatoes, and a purely meat diet is neither good nor wholesome, but it will keep people alive. At the present day there is little fear of their running out of any of the necessities of life.

By the way, when I said that shipwrecked crews were always well treated, I was forgetting the legend of the son of the king of Lochlin (*i.e.* Norway). This gentleman figures in a good many Highland stories, and he generally seems to come

off second-best. When he was wrecked on the coast of St. Kilda he found his way ashore, but while he was drinking from the stream near the village, the natives crept up behind him and held his head under water till he was drowned. This was most inhospitable conduct, but they did their best to make up for their unkindness by christening the rock on which he was wrecked, Sgurr MacRigh Lochlin.

Though at the time of Martin's visit there were three chapels in the island, the spiritual welfare of the St. Kildans was left very much to look after itself. A minister used to go there occasionally to marry, baptize, &c., but if he did not go they performed these rites as best they could by themselves.

We know nothing for certain about the pagan or Roman Catholic priests of St. Kilda, or the date at which the influence of the Reformation was first felt on their distant shores. The first member of the Reformed religion to live among them was the Rev. Alexander Buchan, who resided there from 1705 to 1730. Whether he was reconciled to thus banishing himself from the world by the princely stipend of £16, 13s. 4d., or whether it was from a feeling that he was performing

useful work, is not recorded, but we may give him the benefit of the doubt.

Several reverend gentlemen seem to have taken up their abode at St. Kilda at various times, but it is only since 1830 that the congregation have had the benefit of a permanent minister. It was at this time that the church and manse were built, and the remuneration increased to £50. It is now £80. St. Kilda was mainly indebted for these improvements to Dr. MacDonald, "the Apostle of the North," who paid several visits between 1822 and 1830. When he first caught sight of the rocks of St. Kilda from Harris, where he was waiting for a favourable wind, he exclaimed, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!" Not having these appendages, he was compelled to go like other mortals in a boat. On the way he came very near to being seriously in want of some supernatural means of progression, as the mast broke and the sail came down with a run. However, sufficient length of pole was left to enable the crew to rig up enough canvas to take them to their destination, and though "the billows ran mountains high," they got across in about ten hours.

Every one who writes about St. Kilda mentions



“Where the northern billows in thunder roar
And dash themselves to spray on Hirta’s lonely shore.”

that the billows run mountains high, also that "the birds darken the air." One writer inveighs against the latter phrase because he says it is not true. Perhaps not, but it is at least as true as the other. I have never seen birds on the wing in such numbers as to make it difficult to read, or to appreciably affect the time of exposure necessary for a photograph, but neither have I seen waves 3000 feet high. Both phrases are excellent examples of picturesque exaggeration, and though it may be they have become a trifle worn out by constant use, it is not easy to improve upon them.

It seems to me that exaggeration is more excusable in word descriptions than in drawings. When you read that some one climbed up a snow slope like the side of a house, it adds force to the description, but does not sound ridiculous; when you see a drawing of a snow slope inclined at an angle of about 80° , it is so obviously impossible, at any rate in the eyes of a mountaineer, that the whole effect of the drawing is spoilt.

But we must not leave the "Apostle of the North" waiting too long on the shores of St. Kilda. He seems to have been quite indefatigable in his

efforts to bring the St. Kildans to a state of salvation. On his first visit he did not find a single man "who could truly be called a decidedly religious person," but they told him that a young man had died shortly before his arrival who did little but read the Bible and pray. It was bad luck the Apostle did not meet him, but alas! he died before he was twenty. If religious exercises can produce truly religious people, the St. Kildans must have nearly arrived at that condition before the Doctor had done with them. During his stay he held a service from seven to nine every morning, and again from six to eight in the evening, and whenever he got the chance of talking to any of the natives at other times he examined them on their state of salvation. Lady Grange mentions that the minister in her time was a devout man and "very painful" in the discharge of his duties. I am inclined to think that had I been subject to the ministrations of Dr. MacDonald I should have characterised him as "most painful." However, the St. Kildans seem to have liked it.

It is obvious that an enormous influence for good or ill rests in the hands of the minister. He is the only educated man on the island. He

attends to the education of the children, any matter of dispute is referred to him, and he has endless opportunities of influencing the people both in church and in private life. In 1887 Mr. Connell formed a very unfavourable opinion of the St. Kildans, but he attributed many of their failings to the influence of Mr. MacKay, whose reign in St. Kilda lasted from 1865 to 1890. As during the whole of this time he never left the island, it is hardly to be wondered at that he became narrow-minded and bigoted, and that his influence on the people was not always for the best. He does not appear to have taken much interest in anything except the keeping of the Sabbath. Woe betide any member of his flock who ventured to whistle on a Sunday or go to sleep in church! Such crimes were unpardonable, but on other days they were left to do pretty much as they liked.

It is a lonely life that the "Bishop of St. Kilda," as Mr. Fiddes, the present incumbent, is fond of styling himself, has to lead. Nine weary months out of every year without a chance of exchanging a word with an educated person. I would give a good deal to see one of the winter storms there, when the spray is carried over the highest

cliffs and masses of green water pour over rocks 300 feet in height, but such a sight would be dearly bought at the price of so long a banishment.

The statement about the winter storms is another of the remarks which appear in every article about St. Kilda. It has not done duty as often as the others, because it was only invented by the present minister. When I say invented, I do not wish to impugn his veracity, though it must be admitted I am sceptical about the green water. What I mean is that he first started it by saying he had seen this sight, and it is amusing to note how it grows. Last time it had become "In the winter the waves constantly pour," &c.

The only outsider who has spent a winter in St. Kilda is Mr. Sands, and he did not do it on purpose. He had intended a visit of a few weeks, but a storm at a critical moment prolonged his stay into many months. The "Apostle of the North" says that he would never have ventured to set foot upon St. Kilda unless he had had a call from the Lord. Mr. Sands also claims to have had a call. It was his mission to bring to light the grievances of the down-trodden islanders and to expose the nefarious practices of a rapa-

cious landlord. In other words, he went to stir up discontent among a contented people, and to sow the seeds of discord where discord was not known.

No less a person than Dr. Johnson once seriously contemplated spending a winter at St. Kilda ; at any rate, he said he was serious. Boswell was thinking of buying it, and when he consulted his patron about it, the Doctor said, "Pray do, sir. We will go and pass a winter amid the blasts there. We shall have fine fish, and we will take some dried tongues with us and some books." I do not think that this diet sounds particularly attractive. However, the project never came off. Boswell did not buy it, probably because it was not for sale, and the great lexicographer never had to test his capacity of living on dried tongues.

Some years later it did come into the market. The extravagances of the MacLeod of Lady Grange fame necessitated the sale of part of the family estates by his successor, and St. Kilda was included in the sale of Harris in 1779. It was again sold in 1804, when Colonel Donald MacLeod gave £1350 for it, and when his son, Sir John MacLeod, put it up for sale in 1871, MacLeod of MacLeod bought it for £3000, and it

still belongs to the family with whose name it has so long been associated.

Lord Dunmore, as the feudal superior of St. Kilda, is entitled to an annual fee of one shilling, but I do not think he ever gets it.



SWELL FROM THE WEST

CHAPTER II

ST. KILDA AND THE ST. KILDANS



VOYAGE to St. Kilda is a very different matter now from what it was in 1697 when Martin went there, or in 1758 when Macaulay visited it. They had to go across from Harris in an open boat, and both of them seem to have had a pretty bad time. Martin describes how they noticed signs of a coming storm, but hoping to reach their destination before the bad weather began, they persevered. However, "their fond imagination was not seconded with a good event": they spent sixteen hours out of sight of land, and it was not till the third day after their embarkation that they succeeded in setting foot on the island. Macaulay also came in for a storm, "which did greatly confound the stoutest seaman among us." We went in a more or less comfortable steamer, and had to

face the terrors of the Atlantic for barely four hours.

Access to the island has undoubtedly been facilitated since Martin's time, but the people, their customs, and mode of life are much the same now as they were then. I daresay the place itself has altered quite as much as the inhabitants. The cliffs are composed of very hard rock, but such is the force of the Atlantic waves which are perpetually bombarding the coast that huge masses often break away. We saw the débris of a landslip that must have contained thousands of tons, and in the course of two hundred years such catastrophes must materially affect the configuration of the coast-line. There is no doubt that considerable changes have taken place within historical times. Martin mentions and illustrates in his map that Mian-a-Stac was joined to the mainland by a natural archway. Now it is an island. Macaulay describes the Dùn as being cut off from the rest of the land at high water. Now it can only be reached by jumping from stone to stone at low spring tides ; and before very long more breaches will be made through the ramparts of Dùn, and it will be eventually broken up into a row of stacks in the same way



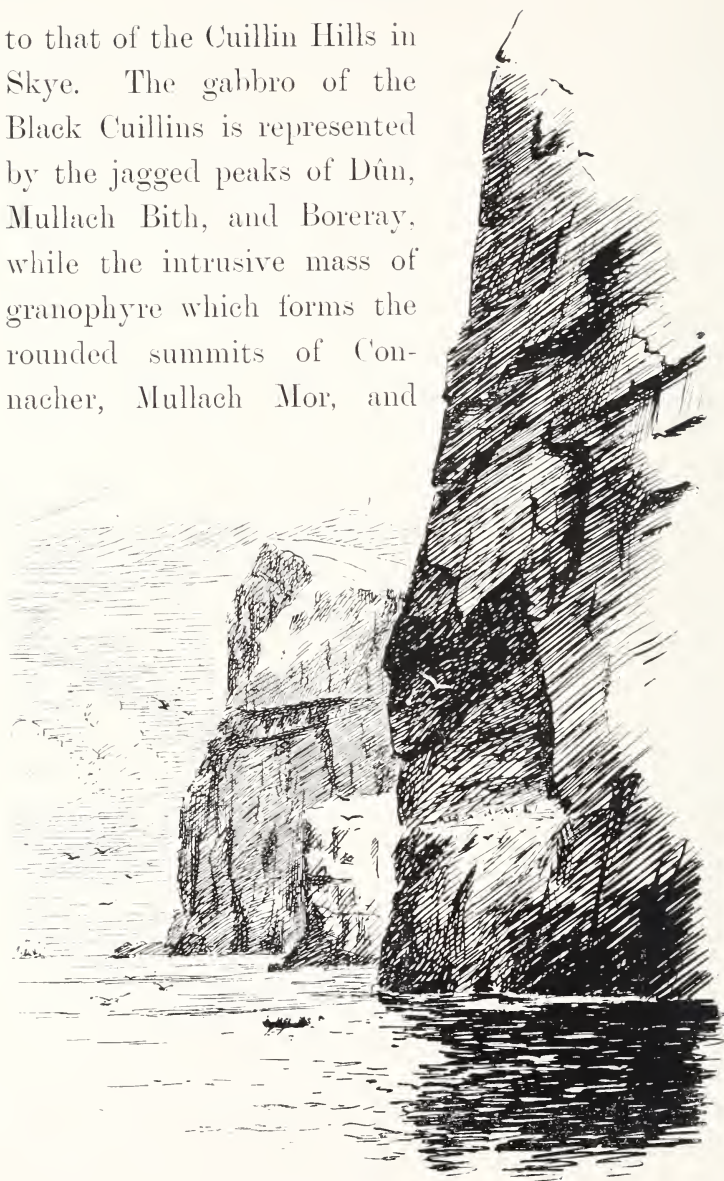
DÛN PASSAGE

as Soay has been separated from Hirta and Levenish from Dùn.

The general character of all the islands composing the group is a tableland of grass slopes terminating in precipices. And such precipices! I have all my life been familiar with the west coast of Skye, and I have rowed in a small boat along the base of the cliffs of Hoy in Orkney; but if I were asked to place them in order of merit for grandeur and impressiveness, I should say St. Kilda first and the rest nowhere. This is owing, perhaps, partly to one's environment. There is a feeling of mystery and romance about St. Kilda that predisposes one to be impressed; but this is not the only reason. The cliffs of Hoy are composed of red sandstone, and to my mind they are much too pretty to be impressive. I like to see black, frowning precipices, with bold forms and picturesque markings, and therefore volcanic rocks, in my opinion, form the grandest cliffs. The precipices in the Stalheim Valley in Norway are much higher than those at St. Kilda, but they consist of a whitish schistose rock having neither colour nor form, and they did not impress me in the least.

The geological formation of St. Kilda is similar

to that of the Cuillin Hills in Skye. The gabbro of the Black Cuillins is represented by the jagged peaks of Dùn, Mullach Bith, and Boreray, while the intrusive mass of granophyre which forms the rounded summits of Connacher, Mullach Mor, and



AT THE FOOT OF CONNACHER

Oiseval corresponds to the red hills to the south of the Sligachan Valley. The cliffs are intersected in all directions by basaltic dykes, and as the sea undermines their base, huge masses break away from above, and they assume all sorts of picturesque forms. In one part you see an unbroken wall of rock without a ledge or crevice to relieve its smooth surface; in another, a series of ledges provide a resting-place for innumerable birds, or slopes of grass present a contrast to the blackness of the rock. Here, the face of the cliff is intersected by cracks, and a great fissure leads downwards till it expands into a gloomy cavern at the bottom; there, a huge pinnacle stands isolated, and the yellow lichen covering its top seems to illuminate the whole scene with a brilliant lustre. Then the caves and natural archways which abound round the coast alone repay a visit to St. Kilda. On a calm day it is possible to row into some of the caves; and, as we found out to our cost, they may be used as places of refuge during a storm. In one of these, on the west side of Dùn, the colouring is more magnificent than anything I have seen elsewhere. The rocks above are as dark as can be, lower down they are a brilliant red, varied with patches of

pink and bright green seaweed; but the marvel of the place is the water. The bottom consists of sand, and a ray of sunlight from above lighting up the clear water over the sand produces the most sparkling and vivid green imaginable. It is a place that can only be seen in exceptionally calm weather, and probably one might go a dozen times without being rewarded by the gorgeous effect we saw. Another most attractive cave is at the mouth of the Glen River. The stream pours in an avalanche of spray across the entrance, and every now and then causes a rainbow to flit across its gloomy recesses. It is very narrow, and so the waves get piled up in masses of green water and foam as they try to force their way in, and then one can watch them breaking against the various buttresses of the sides, till a faint glimmer of white in the distance shows that they must either have reached the end or exhausted themselves in the effort.

From Connacher, the highest point in St. Kilda, there is a sheer drop of 1300 feet into the sea. In Soay, the cliffs, if one may include under that term very steep grass slopes interspersed with precipices, are towards 1000 feet high on all sides. In Boreray, the tableland comes down

to within 200 feet of the sea at two places, while elsewhere the precipices rival those of Soay, and there is only one spot in the whole group where it is possible to obtain access to the sea from above without a climb, namely, in Village Bay, in Hirta. But even here there is no regular landing-place, and as there is generally more or less swell coming into the bay, the operation of getting into or out of a boat is one attended with considerable excitement, and requiring a good deal of time and a great deal of conversation. The St. Kildans, like other Highlanders, do nothing hastily, and discuss the question of the moment from every point of view before taking action.

I had been told about the difficulties of landing, and had read accounts of the awful adventures people underwent when they tried to get ashore on Boreray or Soay, but had always assumed that these accounts were exaggerated. I thought that on an island with about three miles of coast-line there must be some place where a landing would be practicable, and was under the impression that there were days when even the Atlantic was practically still. But I was wrong. I feel sure that if I had to find my own way to the top of

Soay, I should row round and round the island without ever finding a place where it would occur to me to try to land even on a calm day; and it is never calm.

The stranger who first sees St. Kilda from a steamer at anchor in Village Bay does not get a true conception of the place. One appears to be in an amphitheatre of grass slopes, and there is nothing to show that the sky-line forms the edge of a precipice going sheer down into the sea. It is a weird and desolate scene; I believe many people would call it ugly, but personally I like desolation. The little line of houses constituting the village, which seems to cling to the slope on the right (it does not nestle as villages do elsewhere), gives a touch of life which only emphasises the wildness of the rest. Now, let us climb up that great grass slope and see what there is beyond. As we toil upwards, the bay broadens out behind us, and soon the horizon becomes visible over the crest of Dùn, but nothing is to be seen in front but the everlasting slope. Suddenly, as the eye reaches the level of the edge, the sky-line appears in the far distance. Two steps more and a marvellous transformation scene bursts upon us. Instead of the tiresome slope, the vast ex-



THE VILLAGE

panse of sea and sky is spread out before us, the blue outline of the hills of Lewis is faintly traced along the horizon, the cliffs and slopes of Boreray, with its attendant stacks gleaming white in the sunlight, where the gannets sit upon every ledge, rise from the nearer waters, while at our feet the sound of the waves surging against the rocks 200 fathoms below is drowned by the cries of the sea-birds flying to and fro in such countless numbers that the forms of the cliff are blurred by their kaleidoscopic wings. No other word will express my meaning, the dark-green glitter of sea, seen through the ever-shifting patches of black, white, grey, or brown, with occasional gleams of orange and red, as a puffin or oyster-catcher flashes by, reminds me of a kaleidoscope more than anything else.

The view from Connacher is never the same. It is interesting at any time, but is best in the early morning or late in the evening; nor, in order to see it, is it necessary to resort to the measures adopted by some of Macaulay's party, namely, lie flat and get a native to hold on to your heels. Comparatively few people have had the opportunity or inclination to be there before sunrise, but that is the aspect of it that

lives most in my recollection. It was the night when we landed on St. Kilda in 1899. The steamer had reached her anchorage late on Saturday night, but we could not get our things ashore till after twelve o'clock on Sunday night. As there appeared to be no prospect of going to bed, I suggested to an enterprising uncle, who was paying his first visit to St. Kilda, that it would be a good opportunity of seeing the sunrise from such a situation. There was a slight haze on the horizon, but, as far as we could see from Village Bay, not a cloud in the sky when we began our climb soon after 1 A.M.; but when we reached the edge of the cliff, instead of looking down on the sea and away to Boreray as usual, nothing was to be seen except a dark pall of cloud. It did not come close to the cliff, but seemed like a curtain stretched from one promontory to another. The top was a hard, straight line, and it looked so solid that we could hardly believe it was nothing but mist. As we mounted upwards along the edge of the precipice, we gradually rose above the level of the cloud, and the curtain became a vast sea of grey mist with purple shadows, while the black depths that had faced us when we first topped the slope appeared deeper and blacker



"A VAST SEA OF GREY MIST"

than ever in contrast to the lighter surface of the cloud expanse. The whole mass was drifting slowly southwards, and now we could see the upper slopes of Boreray, the billows of cloud surging up against its northern shores, while at the leeward point a deep purple shadow showed that the clouds were barely touching the rocks. On the horizon of our aërial sea the tops of the Lewis and Harris hills stood out dark against the rosy sky, looking like an insignificant reef some three or four miles off. It seemed incredible that they could represent a range of mountains distant sixty or seventy miles. Looking back on our own island, we found that it made a sort of oasis in the sea of mist. The clouds were enveloping the northern face to a height of 600 or 700 feet, in one place pouring over the top of a pass and falling in streaky masses over the other side, but to the south and east the sky was clear to a distance of about a mile from the shore, and the steamer at our feet was still lying with a clear blue sky above her. The sunrise we had come to see was rather a fraud, and we got very cold waiting for it, but the effect we had seen amply repaid our exertions.

Some one asked me the other day if the scenery

of St. Kilda was pretty. Pretty? No! It is grand and awe-inspiring, but not pretty. The first time that we saw it as it ought to be seen, namely, from a small boat coasting round close to the foot of the cliffs, my sister and I were both impressed in the same way, and agreed that the only word that expresses the sensation is "awe." There is something awful yet exhilarating in looking up at a huge black precipice whose jagged outline a thousand feet high appears literally straight over one's head, while the noise of the waves surging against the base and rushing with a dull roar into the caves, the whirr of countless wings and the plaintive cries of the sea-birds, add an appropriate accompaniment to the scene. There are not many scenes that have impressed me in the same way; the sensation is rather similar to that excited by stirring and beautiful music. I felt like this some years ago when I saw Loch Coruisk on a stormy day in winter, when the hills were deep in snow, and I was quite alone; and the same pleasing sensation of awe came over me on the top of Vesuvius, when a terrific explosion sent masses of red-hot stones hurtling upwards from the sea of smoke in the crater; but in this case the pleasure was turned to pain and the awe degenerated

into fear when the said stones began falling all round me and I had to beat a hasty retreat.

I seem to have written a good deal about the scenery of St. Kilda, but have made no reference to the inhabitants, except to suggest that they treated their visitors rather inhospitably. This is the last impression I wish to convey. They are not immaculate, but inhospitality is not one of their faults.

I said in the opening paragraph that drunkenness and crime are unknown. This is a bold statement, but from what I had read about the islanders, and from what I saw during our ten days' sojourn in 1898 I believed it to be justified. Now, however, after a second and longer stay in the place, I am afraid it must be modified. The first part of the remark still holds good, but having discovered that dishonesty is not altogether un-



ST. KILDA MEN

known among the people, it can hardly be claimed for them that there is no crime. They are not teetotallers, and most of them have whisky in their houses, but they rarely drink it except medicinally. Their ordinary drink is whey or tea.



ST. KILDA WOMEN

(Photo by MR. C. CUTCLIFFE HVNE)

It is said that they used to feed newly-born babies with whisky, which does not sound a salutary habit. It might be argued that this custom induced a loathing for spirituous liquors which lasted a lifetime, but inasmuch as most of the

babies so treated died in infancy and the survivors do not dislike spirits, it appears that the argument will not hold water. They have always been a sober people, though, according to some writers, it was the lack of power to get whisky rather than lack of desire to drink it that kept them so in old days. Macaulay says: "Drunkenness is not yet introduced here, but the St. Kildans could be reconciled without any difficulty to spirituous liquors;" and Lord Brougham, who paid a visit to the island in 1799, refers in a tone of disgust to their love of drink; but as he boasts how he stowed away about four bottles of port one evening without any worse effects than to enable him next day to shoot a brace of hares at one shot at a distance of more than 100 yards, one does not feel any great confidence in his statement.

Whether the St. Kildans will succeed in maintaining their temperate habits remains to be seen. So many people seem to take pleasure in making others drunk, that I am afraid the tourists who visit St. Kilda every summer may end in instilling a love of whisky into some of the inhabitants. I was sorry to see the captain of the *Hebrides* forcing whisky on the crew of the

native boat. They obviously did not want it. When he handed them down a glass, each man took a sip and passed it on to his neighbour, but he kept on giving them glass after glass, and though most of them refused to have any more, one or two of the weaker-minded men drank it, and were certainly none the better for it.

I suppose human nature is much the same all the world over, and even in a place like St. Kilda, where one might hope to find the people free from envy, hatred, and malice and all uncharitableness, it seems that they cannot entirely keep their hands from picking and stealing. The present inhabitants are mostly descendants of colonists from Skye and other islands, many of them banished for some crime. This took place 150 years ago, and it might have been expected that any hereditary tendency towards wrong-doing would have been eliminated during several generations, when incentive to crime was practically absent. For what incentive had they? They did not know the value of money, because money was of no use to them. Some, no doubt, were better off than others, but there was not a single individual on the island who had not a good house to live in and a sufficiency of food. This should go a long way to-

wards making them happy and contented, and contentment is the surest preventive of crime. The advent of steamers and tourists has shown them the value of money and taught them to be discontented with their lot, and the result is that several cases of dishonesty have occurred in recent times. I must say that, as far as we were concerned, there never was the slightest cause of complaint. We found them very pleasant to deal with, anxious to do all in their power to please us, not only satisfied but grateful for anything we gave them, and absolutely honest. Perhaps, as relations of the proprietor, they looked on us as more or less belonging to the island. There is a good deal of feudal feeling still remaining in the Highlands, and it is only foreigners that they consider fair game.

Several writers have noticed their hatred and dread of "the Sassenach," and there is no doubt they still look upon outsiders with suspicion, though they expect to make something out of them. "*Timeunt Danaos et dona ferentes.*" We even thought that they were less cordial to us when other English people were on the island than when we were quite alone. I do not wonder that they dislike foreigners, so many of the tourists treat them as if they were wild

animals at the Zoo. They throw sweets to them, openly mock at them, and I have seen them standing at the church door during service, laughing and talking, and staring in as if at an entertainment got up for their amusement. On the other hand, if strangers take them the right way, treat them as friends, enter into their occupations, and do not obviously show their dislike of shaking hands on every possible occasion, they very soon overcome their prejudice. A few years ago one of them was accused of sheep-stealing, and an inspector of police came up to take the offender into custody, but he wandered up and down the village street without finding any one to point out the delinquent's house, and when at last he spotted his man on the shore, he found him surrounded by all the other inhabitants, and eventually had to retire southwards alone, having ignominiously failed to vindicate the majesty of the law.

Doctors who have been sent up to vaccinate the islanders have always been treated in the same way. The recent Act has made no difference to the St. Kildans. There is no need for them to go through the form of saying that they are conscientious objectors. They simply refuse

to allow their children to be operated on, and there is no more to be said. If we are to believe Lord Brougham, their thieving proclivities were very marked a hundred years ago. He complains that they stole everything they could lay hands on ; and relates how he had to invade a suspected house with drawn sword in his hand, in order to recover a cloak that had disappeared. He also accuses them of uncleanness, " beastly degree of filth " is his expression ; in fact, according to him, they had no redeeming quality.

Mr. Connell, writing in 1885, also complains of their dirtiness, and viewed with horror the thought of having to shake hands with them. Either he must have been very particular, or they must have taken to washing during the last fifteen years, for we thought they were remarkably clean. I fancy that a little Keating's powder would add to the comfort of any one sleeping in a native house, and they are not very particular as to where they throw the refuse parts of birds and fishes, but, to outward appearance, they are clean enough in their persons. Fishiness is not looked upon as a reason for refraining from the handshake, but if they have been handling tar or other unpleasant materials, they apologise for not

being able to conform to the ordinary St. Kildan mode of greeting.

In Martin's time they were expert in swimming and diving. Now, none of them can swim, and it is certainly a considerable time since they lost this art. A writer, early in the century, expresses surprise that they should be unable to swim, but, on reflection, comes to the conclusion that it would be of no use to them. As far as I know, there is no record of any one having been drowned, except a whole boat-load when on their way to Harris. In this case, swimming would have been of no avail; but I should have thought that, in the case of a boat being upset in the process of landing, a by no means impossible contingency, it would just make the difference between life and death.

Some writers have accused them of being grasping. Possibly the fact that so many people have given them presents, and that they have been paid liberally, often too liberally, for anything they have done, has tended to make them so, but we certainly did not discover it. They have been presented with boats, nets, ropes, furniture, food, and all kinds of things at various times, and I am afraid it is a trait of human nature, not so

much to be grateful to the people who give, as to be annoyed with those who don't. Mr. Connell relates how the St. Kildans despised a gift of provisions made by a certain Duke who visited the island in a fine yacht. They had expected more from such a big man and such a big ship. He also declares that they chopped up one of their boats, a present from the South, for firewood, because it was not exactly what they wanted. I daresay that their limited knowledge of the value of money has been partly responsible for their reputation of greed. Until quite recently, when pedlars have taken to visiting the island, and have made it possible for the women to spend 3s. 6d. on a coloured handkerchief worth perhaps 4d., they had no use for money. Rent was paid in kind, and all their wants were supplied by the factor in exchange for cloth, oil, &c. It is hardly to be wondered at that the gentleman who asked the natives to get him a fulmar's egg, and was told that the price was a sovereign, should form the opinion that they were greedy for money ; but the explanation is that, a short time before, a wealthy yachtsman had asked for the same article, and had generously, but, from an ethical point of view, wrongfully, given them a sovereign for their

trouble. They were absolutely ignorant of the true market value of the egg, and, not unnaturally, assumed that, if it was worth 20s. to one man, it would be so also to another.

I find it difficult to make up my mind as to whether they are lazy or not. There is no doubt they waste a lot of time; but I am inclined to think that this is because they are as ignorant of the value of time as of the value of money. One day they were talking of going to Boreray on the morrow, but the factor wanted to get a little business done first, and, not to interfere with their plans, agreed to be ready for them at 5 A.M. The first man turned up at 10.30, and it was past six in the evening before they got off in the boat.

Every morning they spend a long time discussing what the plan of campaign for the day is to be, and seldom start doing anything before ten o'clock. Sometimes they will take a whole day making up their minds to go fishing on the next, but when once started they are most industrious, and do not seem to mind hard work.

If there is some doubt as to the laziness of the men, there is none as to the energy of the women. They do most of the carrying of goods up from the shore and peats down from the hills; they

walk over to the glen, a distance of about two miles, over a pass 800 feet high, twice every day during the summer, to milk the cows and ewes; they work on the crofts, and when not otherwise employed, occupy

themselves with spinning and knitting. The

girls begin carrying weights at a very early age.

The illustration shows a child of about eleven

bringing two pails full of water up from the well;

and I have seen a girl of about the same age,

with a smaller child on one arm

and a bucket of water in the other, or coming over the hill with a sheep on her back.

Mr. Kearton seems to have been unable to induce the women to let him photograph them



RETURNING FROM THE WELL

at the "shieling." I was more fortunate, and secured pictures of the milking both of cows and ewes.

The fact that the men do all the sewing of the island has been so often commented on, that a



MILKING THE EWES

schoolmistress was sent up last summer to teach the girls to sew, and to relieve the minister from his scholastic duties for a time. One would have thought that a knowledge of Gaelic would be more

useful for such an undertaking than proficiency in Arabic and Greek, but it is not easy to get any one to spend a summer in such an out-of-the-way place, and it certainly would have been difficult to find a more suitable person than the lady selected proved to be in spite of her ignorance of the native tongue. She came up armed with beds, chairs, tables, &c., with a view of occupying our house, and we were told that she was wandering disconsolate on the shore, not knowing where to lay her weary head. At last she found a haven of rest in the manse; but her troubles were not over, as, when the minister went away for his holiday, she had great difficulty in getting anything to eat. A few tinned meats would have been more useful than chairs and tables, but she had been told there was a store on the island, and had brought no provisions. There is a store—for salt fish and feathers; but there are no means of buying things to eat. One day we took her some fish, and she said, with a sigh of gratitude, “Ah! that will ensure a meal for two days.” It is not every one who would have put up with these discomforts and been happy and contented all the time, but she was interested in her work, and found the children

intelligent and anxious to learn. If, as the result of her labours, the women undertake the tailoring of the islands as well as their other duties, it is to be hoped they will succeed in making the children's clothes fit rather better than the men can do.

Their language, of course, is Gaelic ; and, until quite recently, none of the natives of St. Kilda could speak anything else. The children are now taught English in the school, and the rising generation can talk it very well ; but all the older people "have no English." With a view to carrying on conversation with the natives in a more satisfactory manner than can be done by signs, my sister spent the greater part of the winter between our two visits, learning Gaelic. It is not an easy language to learn colloquially, and presents considerable difficulties to any one trying to master it grammatically ; but to learn it by book, in the hope of being able to talk and understand it, is truly an appalling task. Foreigners say that English spelling and pronunciation are bothering, but an Englishman will generally recognise a word even if it is pronounced wrong. In Gaelic it is quite possible to know how to spell a word and yet pronounce it in a way that no Gael will understand ;

while the converse, knowing how to pronounce a word and being unable to spell it, is almost a certainty. Who would ever guess that "Vâtee" is spelt "Mhadaith," or that "aghaidh" (face) is pronounced something like "ai-e," and "dealbh" (picture) "jealav"?

My sister reeled off sentences with great fluency, but each sentence seemed to require a considerable amount of thought, making a lengthy conversation somewhat tedious; and as on occasions she had to lapse into English, she was not always understood of the people. Discoursing English to a St. Kildan is about as useful as hurling a sentence composed of French, German, and English at any Italian who understands nothing but his own language, as I had the pleasure of hearing on one occasion. We were driving down the usual sort of Alpine road, precipice on one side, raging torrent on the other, when, at a critical moment, the breeching-strap broke. The horse began to kick, the driver laid into him with the whip, which made him rampage all over the road, and all we could do was to sit tight and hope for the best. Nothing much happened, and the strap was soon tied up with a bit of string, as is the custom in Italy; but naturally it broke again at

the next steep pitch, and the same evolutions were gone through as on the previous occasion; but now my companion thought we had had enough of it and appealed to the more responsible driver of another carriage to take our man's whip away. Italian is not his strong point, and in the excitement of the moment the sentence he produced was: "*Il va comme cela avec son—whip—und dann alles ist gebrochen.*"

I should say they are the most truly religious people I have ever come across, not merely because they go to church a great deal and have daily prayers in their houses morning and evening, but because they seem really devout and honestly believe their religion to be the most important part of their life. Can this be said of any other community? I am not speaking of individuals. One evening some of the men came in from fishing utterly exhausted, having been out all the previous night, and having had a very hard row, but this did not prevent them from going down to a service which was being held in the church half-an-hour later. There was no compulsion; they went simply because they thought fatigue was no excuse for omitting a religious duty. What impressed me most, however, was the manner in

which they prayed one evening when we had been caught by a storm and had to spend the night in a boat. It was not a religious outburst that is sometimes brought out in the presence of danger. We were in no danger, and they are quite accustomed to the perils of the sea; but one could not help feeling that their prayers were really genuine. Some of the tourists were arguing that the St. Kildans were humbugs, because one of the visitors—a minister—had succeeded in persuading them to sell some cloth on a Sunday. They would not take the money or deliver the goods till Monday morning, but it was argued that the fact of their having executed the deal on the Sabbath proved that their professions of Sabbatarianism were hypocritical. Comment is needless. As compared with other Highlanders, they are not superstitious, though they do believe that the advent of a cuckoo in spring portends the death of the proprietor, for this has been their belief from time immemorial; and as no cuckoo has visited the island since the year of the late MacLeod's death, they are almost justified in their superstition.

They have rather quaint notions sometimes. One day a man came to the factor with a

mysterious air and a large parcel under his arm, which he proceeded to undo. After taking off several wrappings of paper and layer after layer of cloth, he produced a small stone, and explained that the previous night he had followed a will-



INSPECTION "IN CAMERA"

o'-the-wisp until it had disappeared behind a stone, and that, by taking this stone away, he had locked up the will-o'-the-wisp, which would never be able to get out as long as he held the key.

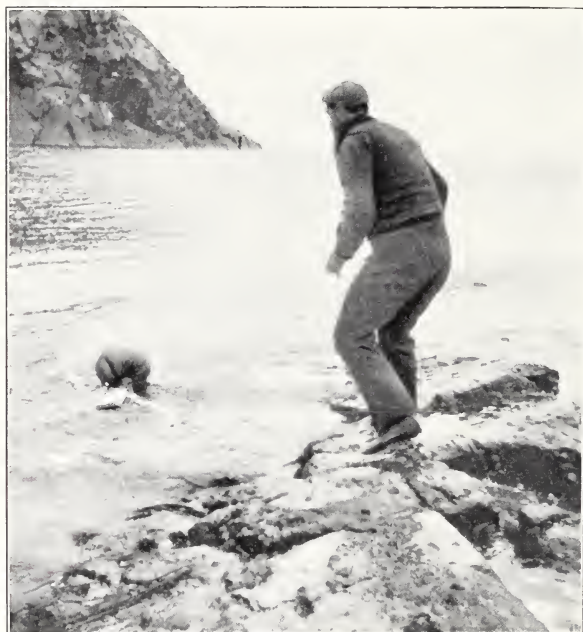
If they get an idea into their heads, it is very difficult to get it out. For some reason or other

they made up their minds that the author of "Captain Kettle," who was taking a holiday in St. Kilda last year, was a Roman Catholic priest. What suggested this notion I cannot imagine. It is true that he did not go to church, and the fact

that he knew no Gaelic was not looked upon as sufficient excuse ; it is true, also, that on a certain Friday he was seedy, and did not accompany us on our expedition ; but this seems rather slender evidence on which to found such a theory. However they were firmly persuaded that such was the case, and declared that he was seen in his white sacrificial robes going up the hill to perform some popish rites. We could not think what the explanation of this phenomenon could be, but it turned out that it was a rainy morning, and he had walked up the hill in a white mackintosh !

There was a rumour that the Duke of York was going to pay a visit to St. Kilda. The people were much excited, and not only made up their minds that he certainly would come, but even fixed the day. The eventful day arrived, and, in spite of the fact that it was blowing half a gale of wind and pouring with rain, they were greatly disappointed that no steamer appeared round the corner, and they lived in daily expectation of his coming for weeks afterwards. It is to be hoped that this great desire to see a scion of the royal house was entirely due to loyalty, but the prospect of receiving a present worthy of a royal Duke may have had something to do with it.

Their method of sending letters in the winter by letting them drift across the ocean has been so often described that I need not enlarge upon it. Several friends had expressed a wish to receive a



DESPATCHING THE ST. KILDA MAIL

letter despatched in this unorthodox fashion; so we packed four or five into a tin, and I took a photo of Finlay MacQuien as he was starting the little boat on July 3rd. Nothing having been heard of our epistles when we got home two months later,

we supposed they had miscarried; but on October 9th a telegram arrived to say that one of the letters had been delivered. Next day brought a registered envelope, with another of the precious documents enclosed for our inspection, and it appeared that the boat, which, as one of the natives expressed it, was "without no skipper on board to steer her to port, but God alone," had been carried across to Norway, where it was found "driving in a plank," which I take to be the Norwegian-English equivalent for drifting on a piece of wood. We had not contemplated a four months' immersion, and "the water it soon came in, it did," with the result that one of the letters was not delivered, presumably being illegible, and the one reproduced was open and had to be officially sealed with a considerable expenditure of red-tape and sealing-wax. Some one collared the pennies we had put in for postage, but none of the recipients grudged the fivepence they had to pay for their letter from the sea.

Last winter St. Kilda enjoyed unusual facilities for communicating with the rest of the world, as the engineer who was looking after the construction of the pier, which is being made for the convenience of the islanders, wished to be able to

report progress from time to time, and made arrangements with the trawlers to act as postmen. We sent several letters to our St. Kildan friends, and received delightful epistles in return, without having to depend on the fickleness of the ocean currents.

An account of St. Kilda would be incomplete without some reference to the dogs. No visitor to the island can fail to notice them ; not that they are conspicuous for their beauty, but because they make such a hideous row when any one goes near the landing-place. We are told that "dogs delight to bark and bite." Certainly the St. Kildan mongrels are not behind others of their species in the former characteristic ; and possibly the fact that their teeth are blunted to prevent them from injuring the sheep may account to some extent for their lack of biting propensities. I never saw one seriously try to bite any one ; probably they find that they get no satisfaction from it, and it is not worth the risk. All the same, I prefer having a big stick handy when walking up the village street. They are used by the natives to assist them in catching sheep, either singly or in flocks. One day I saw a man pointing out a sheep on the side of the hill to his dog. After



A LETTER FROM THE SEA

a short but exciting chase the dog laid hold of the sheep and held it fast till his master came up. They are not always so successful. I have watched them spend a long time in fruitless endeavours to catch the one wanted. A man and a woman drove the animals along the side of the hill, but as soon as they found they were being driven into a corner they began to break back, and no amount of running on the part of the man or his dogs could prevent them from getting away, and the whole operation had to be gone through again.

This was on the main island, where the sheep are mostly of the black-faced breed. It is a still more difficult matter to catch those on Soay. They are small, light-brown animals, as wild and active as chamois, and when the St. Kildans want to catch them they chase them round and round the island till they succeed in driving them into an *impasse*, some ledge among the rocks, from which there is no escape even for these active creatures. It may easily be imagined that this method of procedure often results in some of the sheep falling over the precipice; but this has been the custom from time immemorial, and the people would rather lose any number of sheep than intro-

duce a new method. Besides, the sheep on Soay all belong to the landlord ! One day, when I was wandering about Soay, I found a lamb with a malformed leg, which prevented rapid motion. This seemed a good opportunity of getting a photo, so I pursued him with the camera. There was no difficulty in getting near, and I got what I hoped would prove a charming picture ; but, on development, I found that, instead of a beautiful little creature with soft brown wool and pathetic eyes, the camera had seen a fearsome-looking object more like a lion than a lamb, and apparently with only one leg : and yet we are told that a photograph cannot lie !

It is interesting to see the dogs getting ashore and climbing up the rocks. When the boat comes within ten or twelve yards of the shore, the word of command is given, and a dozen dogs leap into the sea and swim towards the rocks. A few succeed at the first attempt in making good their hold on the steep slope, and scramble up out of reach of the waves, but others are sucked down by the falling waters, vainly pawing at the limpet-covered surface until another wave hurls them up again, and casts them, panting and bleeding, by the side of their more fortunate fellows. Some of them

show extraordinary activity in climbing up the rocks, and will follow their masters unaided up the steepest precipices, but the younger ones have to be assisted by their two-footed friends, and look unutterably miserable as they are hauled up the cliffs dangling at the end of a rope.

They are also wonderfully clever at embarking. I have seen one spring safely into a boat eight or ten feet distant from the steep slippery rock on which the dog was standing; but perhaps the best canine performance we witnessed was the embarkation of one of them from Soay. The dog slid down the twenty feet of almost perpendicular rock that separated us from the tossing boat, and giving a spring exactly at the right moment, arrived safe and sound among the oars and fishing lines. There is some luck about it. Another, who attempted the same feat, found that the boat had swung away from the shore at the moment when he had to make his spring, with the result that he landed, if such an expression may be used under the circumstances, ignominiously in the water.

They have a wonderful intuition as to when a boat is going out or coming in, and even as to when a steamer is expected. No matter what

time of day or night, a chorus of barks is a sure indication that something is happening or going to happen by the landing-place. As long as a boat is at work on the fishing grounds they pay no attention, but the moment her nose is pointed towards the shore, down they all rush, barking and snapping and rolling over one another in their excitement. Occasionally one of them gets caught by a fish-hook, which sobers the individual affected for a time, but they seem pretty well accustomed to such a mishap and soon begin barking again. There was one black-and-white brute that I often longed to kill. He had got a peculiarly offensive voice, and seemed to have no difficulty in exercising it by the hour together without ever taking breath. I can understand the necessity of giving vent to one's feelings on an important occasion like the landing of a boat, but I wish some one would explain to that dog that there is moderation in all things.

One day we were asked to assist at the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone of the new school. Hitherto the kirk has had to do duty as schoolhouse as well as church, but in 1898 it was decided to build a room which would be more convenient as a classroom than the kirk, and at



THE LANDING-PLACE

the same time to execute some necessary repairs to the latter edifice. We were much impressed when the foreman told us that he was a Freemason, and that the stone was to be laid with full Masonic honours. My sister was invited to take the principal part, and I was informed that I should be expected to make a speech. At the appointed hour, we went down to the kirk, and found Mr. MacDonald, the foreman, very busy making preparations. The first difficulty that arose was that some of the natives could not write, and as a memorandum to be buried under the stone had to be signed by all those present, this seemed something of a problem. However, it was solved by John Mackenzie forging the names of the illiterate ones. The next difficulty to be overcome was insuperable. A newspaper of the day was to be buried with the memorandum. St. Kilda has not got a daily press, and we had had no communication with the rest of the world for more than a week! The only thing to be done was to take an old newspaper, and hope that the fulness of the Masonic honours would not be impaired by the irregularity. The bottle, which had erstwhile harboured sweets and retained a pepperminty smell, was full enough.

Having performed these preliminaries to the satisfaction of the master of the ceremonies, we repaired to the site of the school where the speechifying took place. I did not inflict a very long oration upon the assembled crowd, partly because I had nothing particular to say, partly because there was a cold wind blowing, and my sister, being in the post of honour on the top of a wall, was in a very exposed situation; but the minister managed to talk for half-an-hour about the history of education in St. Kilda, and we were not sorry when the stone had been well and properly laid in its place and we were able to retire and get warm again. On our way south the foreman introduced the contractor to my sister, saying that she had laid the foundation-stone, and expecting that he would make some pretty speech. What he did say was, "Ah! I don't care much about the foundation-stone; it is the coping-stone I look to." However, she was mollified later on by receiving a neat little wooden hammer, with an inscription, sent by the contractor as a souvenir of the ceremony.

When we revisited St. Kilda the following year, we found the school finished and the kirk renovated out of all recognition. It had been an edifice with bare plaster walls and the slope

of the hillside for floor. Now it has been neatly match-boarded throughout, the floor has been levelled and boarded, and a carpet put down at the pulpit end; but in spite of its neat appearance and the picturesqueness of the people, with their coloured shawls and handkerchiefs, we found that a service of three and a quarter hours was rather trying to the patience. It was not always as long as that, but even two hours of Gaelic is more than I can listen to with pleasure. The thing that impressed me most about the service was the extraordinarily good behaviour of the children. Little mites of five or six years old would sit through the whole performance without even fidgeting, and even babies in arms seldom disturbed the peace of the congregation. I was also struck with the *sangfroid* with which Mr. Fiddes would continue his discourse through any amount of interruption. Occasionally, a baby would start an opposition show in the body of the church, thumping and kicking and yelling at the top of its voice, but the minister went calmly on, and he always got the best of it in the end, as, if the baby did not pretty soon exhaust its lung powers, it was ignominiously carried out of church.

It is curious to reflect what a number of things

that are commonplaces of everyday life in other parts of the British Isles are absolutely unknown to the St. Kildans, with the exception of the few who have been South. The minister has done his best to induce some trees to grow, but they seem unable to get higher than the wall which shelters them, and so the islanders have never seen any form of vegetation more than four feet high. One of them was seen stamping at the roots of these trees, "because," he said, "we don't want trees in our island to take up the ground where grass would grow for the sheep."

Another form of plant life which is common enough elsewhere does not, as far as I know, exist in St. Kilda, and that is the common daisy. There is no lack of other flowers, though the people do not seem to know their names; but fancy a place where the children have never had the chance of making a daisy chain!

No doubt there are any number of people in the Hebrides who have never seen a railway, but I doubt if it could be said of any one but a St. Kildan that he had never seen a road; nor is it easy to find a community whose members are unacquainted with the appearance of a horse or a pig, and to whom the ubiquitous bicycle is scarcely even a name. On the other hand, they know what a theodolite is like, as I had one this year to assist

me in making a map of the island. I am not sure that they altogether approved of that map. They thought there was something uncanny about the strange implement, and none of them seemed very anxious to give any assistance. Had I fully realised before embarking in it what a tough job it would be, I doubt if I should have undertaken it; but as no map of St. Kilda with any pretension to accuracy was in existence, I thought I might fulfil a duty to society by completing the cartography of my native land, and, at the same time, give myself an interesting occupation. It was interesting work, but owing to inexperience in the use of a theodolite, occasional carelessness in the reading of angles, and mistakes made in calculations, the number of hours I spent over it was something appalling.



YOUNG GULL

CHAPTER III

BOATING AND CLIMBING IN ST. KILDA



I HINTED in the last chapter that the St. Kildans are not very expeditious in their movements, and have no idea of the value of time. If they were going to take us out in the boat, they would say we must be ready by nine o'clock to get the benefit of the tide round a certain promontory. When we had sat for half-an-hour on the rocks, two men would appear. They look at the boat and talk for five minutes, then one of them returns to the village to fetch the others. When all have at length appeared and said all they want to say, they proceed to haul down the boat. Soon after ten we are seated in comparative comfort in the stern, and have hopes that we are off. Not a bit of it. They have forgotten an oar. Then it is discovered that one of the rowlocks is broken,



Boating in L. P. Hilda

and a new one has to be made. This is done by whittling a bit of stick. A long conversation follows, and we find that the question now is, what the lady is to sit on: some advocate a plank, others an empty box. Eventually the box carries the day and we are off, but of course we have missed the tide.

Boating in St. Kilda was a new experience to me. I have been out in a small boat in a groundswell often enough, but had never even thought of landing on steep and slippery rocks in such a swell as there always seems to be up there. Even after a long spell of fine weather, the boat was rising and falling quite ten feet on the lee side of Boreray when we landed there; and one day, when we attempted to get ashore on Soay, the surf was so heavy that we had to give it up. One soon gets accustomed to it, but I must plead guilty to a feeling of something like alarm when the boat was lying within a few yards of a great black rock, while a huge mass of water was rushing upon us threatening to hurl us remorselessly on to its forbidding-looking ledges; but the alarm gives place to a pleasurable feeling of excitement when you feel the wave pass under the boat, and see a seething mass of green and white in the

place where the rock had been a moment before. There is a wonderful fascination about a rough sea. I can stand for hours on the shore watching the rollers coming in, and it is even more fascinating when you are tossing about on the waves themselves in a small boat. A steamer is not the same thing; and I confess to having more than once wished that the waves were not quite so big after inspecting them for an hour or two from the deck of a big ship. In a small boat one does not experience that sinking feeling which is so disquieting to the internal arrangements of the human frame. During our stay in St. Kilda we had plenty of opportunities of studying wave motion, for though we never had anything like a winter storm, there was often wind enough to raise a fairly big sea. One day we were lying off the rocks of Soay, waiting for an opportunity to land, and as we rose to the top of a wave we looked down a great green slope of water to where the previous wave was boiling and seething in the depths of a cave some forty or fifty yards in. One could not help feeling that the boat must slide down the slope and be engulfed in the eddying foam. However, it didn't. Another day we went out fishing after dinner. It was blowing



"A SEETHING MASS OF GREEN AND WHITE."

pretty fresh, and pouring with rain, and as we sat there enveloped in oilskins, we thought of some of our English friends and wondered what they would think of our idea of pleasure. After setting the long lines we found ourselves, at about 11 P.M., near the end of the sheltering promontory of the bay, and just opposite a natural archway through the rock. We could see great waves breaking on the other side, looking ghost-like in the twilight, though we ourselves were in comparatively calm water. It was a magnificent scene: the black rocks towering above, the sea raging below, and the wind hurling the rain and spray in our faces as the men tried to take the boat through the archway. It was no use; the heavy boat, rowed by six strong men, seemed like a feather, and was whirled round by the wind so that we only just escaped being dashed against the rocks.

People at home are rather apt to exaggerate the danger of boating expeditions such as we undertook in St. Kilda, but we did have one adventure that might have ended disastrously. I had been up Stac Lii, the principal breeding-place of the gannets, early in June, but my sister was unable to accompany me on that occasion;

and as I was anxious that she should not miss one of the most wonderful sights that St. Kilda can produce, and also wanted to get some photographs of young gannets, we determined to make another expedition to Boreray towards the end of July 1899. It seemed a most promising morning. Finlay MacQuien did say, "Ah! we shall spend the night in Boreray," but I thought he was only joking, especially as the others all agreed that it was a good day to go, and that the landing would be easy. Our party consisted of my sister and myself, three young Englishmen, who generally went by the name "the boys," because they were a good deal younger than we were, and three natives. The "Sassenachs" being new to St. Kilda, did not venture up Stac Lii, but Finlay, my sister, and I got ashore with some difficulty and had a most satisfactory climb. By the time we got down again the sky was overcast and the wind seemed freshening; but I wanted to land on Boreray for surveying purposes, and it seemed brutal to make for home without giving "the boys" a chance of seeing Boreray and eating their luncheon on *terra firma*. So we ignored the dictates of prudence, and were soon comfortably seated round a delicious spring at the foot of the steep grass



A NATURAL ARCHWAY

slopes. Luncheon-time in St. Kilda does not mean one or two o'clock, but any time that happens to be convenient. On this occasion it was about 3.30, and it was close upon 5 P.M. before we had climbed down the cliffs and all got on board again. As soon as we had rowed round the corner, it became evident that we should have a job to get home. Wind and tide were against us, and the former seemed to be freshening every minute. After pulling steadily for about an hour and a half, we found ourselves about a mile from the shore. Three miles of surging ocean still lay between us and St. Kilda, the wind was blowing pretty hard, it had begun to rain, and the sea had risen so fast that we were beginning to ship a good deal of water. I was for turning back and getting into shelter as soon as possible, but the men seemed to think there was still a chance of our making St. Kilda when the tide turned, so we persevered; but when another hour and a half made no appreciable difference in our position, it became obvious that we should have to spend the night out. By this time the wind looked like developing into a gale, and I must say I was doubtful about the prudence of sailing back to Boreray in our small open boat.

However, we had all had about enough rowing, and we minimised the danger by taking every precaution. One man held the sheet and another the halyard, so that they could lower the trebly-reefed sail in a moment. A few minutes of wild excitement and we were flying past the landing-place we had left three hours before. No chance of landing there now: so on we sped, the green waves racing behind us, now and again lashing us with spray, as if to say it was no time for dawdling, and soon we rounded the south-east point of Boreray and found ourselves in absolute quiet under the sheltering archway of a cave. We had had visions of landing and spending the night in a hut with a bright fire and roast puffins for dinner, but no such luxuries were in store for us. The men said that, if the wind were to shift to the south, the cave would be unsafe, and they would have to leave at a moment's notice; and as to reach the hut would entail a difficult climb of about 800 feet in a thick mist, there was nothing for it but to make the best of it in the boat. Fortunately my sister had worn an oilskin all the time and was comparatively dry. I had got so wet rowing that my oilskin was only useful to keep me moderately warm. The others



THE NIGHT IN THE CAVE

were in worse plight, as they had no overcoats and were clad in light summer costume. One of "the boys" who had been in the bows must have been wet to the skin, and though the night was not really cold, I daresay he would have wished it a good deal warmer. If we had been dry and had had enough to eat, we might have spent the night without any great discomfort; but we had not contemplated being out late, and all that remained from luncheon was a piece of cake, a few biscuits, and some chocolate, while the men had some cheese and cold tea. It was an occasion on which a non-smoker is at a great disadvantage. I have seldom enjoyed a smoke more than my after-dinner pipe that night. Presently Norman MacKinnon, the only English-speaking member of our crew, told us that they were going to "make worship," and then followed one of the most impressive services I have ever attended. I could not understand a word, but the earnestness of the men, the intoning of their prayers, the weirdness of the Gaelic tune to which they sang a psalm, and the solemn grandeur of the place, combined to make it a most interesting and impressive ceremony. We were anchored in a sort of

triangular cave about sixty yards wide at the mouth, with deep water right up to the end, and plenty of head-room. It was perfect shelter from wind and rain; but in spite of being "rocked in the cradle of the deep," we none of us succeeded in getting much rest. Several times I was nearly asleep, but either I slipped down into a pool of fishy water and bumped my head against an oar, or the boat drifted too near the rocks and had to be shoved off; at any rate, something always happened to prevent sleep, and so there was plenty of time for observing the natural phenomena of our night's quarters. The phosphorescent lights on the water were most beautiful. All round the sides of the cave where the swell washed against the rocks there was an ever-changing row of bright lights. Occasionally a gleam would appear on a wavelet in the foreground, only to vanish instantly and be succeeded by another in some other place, but the principal display was round the edges. Then, as it began to get lighter (it was never absolutely dark), it was interesting to watch the birds getting up. Gannets, fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, and shags were sleeping either in our cave or just outside it, and we witnessed a fight over a fish

between two gannets, and also the unceremonious way in which a mamma guillemot shoved her young one into the water. I fancy I have read disputes as to how the young guillemots are conveyed to the sea, whether the mother carries them in her beak or on her back. In this case the nest was on a ledge overhanging the water, some ten or twelve feet high, and the method was most elementary. Mamma gave baby a push, and they both arrived in the water with a flop. I found that it was much more difficult to identify birds when they are merely dark silhouettes against the sky than when one can distinguish their colours. Once or twice I mistook a gannet for a skart, though by daylight it would be quite impossible to mistake the one for the other. The gannets began saying "Gurrok, gurrok, gurrok, gurrok," at a very early hour, but some kittiwakes who inhabited our cave had been before them in making remarks on the invasion of their quarters.

At about 3 A.M. we nibbled a bit of chocolate and went outside to see what the weather was like. It was hopeless. We utterly failed to get round the corner of the island, and I was rather afraid we might get blown right out to sea.

With some difficulty we regained our friendly shelter and spent five more hours in vain endeavours to sleep. I must admit that, if it had been left to me, I should have given up our next attempt as hopeless. Rowing all we knew, we just managed to creep forwards, but it was obviously impossible to keep that up for four miles. However, the natives said that, if we could once get clear of Boreray, it would be all right. And sure enough, we found the wind was less violent and had shifted a point or two to the west; and three hours later we landed in St. Kilda, after an absence of about twenty-four hours. There was great excitement on the shore. The hand-shaking was more than usually energetic and prolonged, and one of the natives could only give utterance to his feelings by the somewhat unexpected exclamation "By Jove!" The faithful Sandy, an old sailor who performed the duties of "maid-of-all-work" in our establishment, had got a most excellent breakfast ready for us, and while we did ample justice to it, he discoursed upon what his feelings had been as he listened to the wind howling round the corners, and felt the whole house shaking in the violence of the squalls. He even got as far as thinking how he would have to

break the news of our sad end when the steamer came a week later to take him south.

One great comfort had been that none of our people knew what we were doing, and the only persons likely to be concerned about our safety were Sandy, and the schoolmistress who was temporarily staying in St. Kilda, as the natives would know that there was very little danger. The schoolmistress climbed up to the top of the cliff facing Boreray, and though she could see no sign of a boat, waved her handkerchief by way of encouragement. This was not likely to render us any material assistance, but the intention was excellent, and certainly did not deserve the snubbing she got from Sandy, who told her she might as well have kept her handkerchief in her pocket.

Several people have asked me if I did not feel very anxious being out on such an expedition with a lady. My answer is, that it depends on the lady. As it was, I doubt if we were ever in any serious danger, and though many ladies would have been frightened and most would have been miserable, my sister, so far from being frightened, positively enjoyed it the whole time, and so I felt at liberty to enjoy myself or be miserable as

I felt inclined. It is not much fun rowing with heavy, badly-balanced oars in a rough sea. The natives are accustomed to it, and did splendid work, but I felt that my efforts to propel the boat were very feeble; and I don't know that "the boys," who, in spite of the depressing effects of sea-sickness, gallantly took their turn at the oar, did any better. There was a very big swell coming in from the north-west, but this was hardly noticeable in our small boat, except that at one moment we could see the cliffs of St. Kilda down to the water's edge, and at another nothing was visible except a mountainous slope of water. What bothered us were the short waves caused by the previous night's gale. The blade of the oar would at one time be so depressed that the handle was well above my head, then a wave would cover it and make it impossible to get it out of the water, so that altogether I felt alternately like the men in the song, "On River Thames," one of whom "caught crabs continually," another "went right down to the bottom," and a third "didn't touch the water at all." My sister, who steered the whole time, found that her task was no sinecure. The boat was fitted with rudder lines instead of a tiller, an arrangement

admirably adapted for a light skiff on a river, but entailing a fearful strain on the arms with a heavy boat in a rough sea, and she was black and blue for days afterwards.

On this occasion our crew behaved very well, but I am not sure that one can say that the St. Kildans are good men in a boat. They are rather apt to talk instead of devoting themselves to their oars at a critical moment. One day we were rowing through a narrow passage between Mian-a-Stac and the main island, and just as we got to the narrowest part, where the tide was running pretty strong, there came a series of big waves. The back-wash from both sides made it rather a nasty place. We shipped a good deal of water, and there seemed a distinct possibility of capsizing; anyhow it was an occasion when it was desirable to keep her head straight and to have steerage-way on, and not a situation to select for rowing spasmodically and all out of time. The conversation that the rowers indulged in would have done just as well when the danger was past.

The most important feature of boating in St. Kilda is getting into and out of the boat, and in this branch of aquatic art the natives excel. It is not by any means easy to land even in Village

Bay, so slippery are the rocks at low tide; and it is quite an entertaining sight to watch the tourists boldly jumping ashore, and then picking themselves up after discovering the nature of the



LANDING ON SOAY

landing-place. When the wind blows from the south-east it may be impossible to land, but during the ten weeks that we spent on the island there were only two or three days when there would have been any serious difficulty. Once

when the *Dunara Castle* came in, the passengers were not allowed to go ashore. There was surf enough to make the embarkation of goods a troublesome job; but my sister and I went out to the steamer to buy jam and things, and got back again without getting wet. On such occasions we, and perhaps three or four natives, would get into the boat while she was still high and dry on the rocks, and the rest would run her down into the sea and scramble on board as best they could. It is rather an awful moment that plunge. There is more than a possibility of getting a ducking, and there is a tendency to feel that the probability of upsetting is greater than it really is. It is not as easy as it looks, launching a boat. When we were leaving St. Kilda, we wanted to get on board on Sunday, and "the boys" offered to row us out in the evening. Having put our luggage in the boat, we proceeded to launch it, but one of them, in attempting to jump in in true St. Kildan fashion, took off at the wrong moment, or committed some equally pernicious fault, and when the boat righted itself we saw our bags, cameras, and theodolites floating about in eighteen inches of water.

I have seen the water in Village Bay as calm as

it may be at Brighton, but outside there is always a swell, and this makes landing on the other islands, where the rocks are just as slippery and much steeper than those near the village, a very different matter.

It is impossible to get photos which give any idea of the difficulties of landing, because the motion of the boat cannot be rendered; but if the reader will kindly imagine that she is rising and falling continually, and that the surface of the rock is of the nature of London pavements on a damp day, I hope that the illustrations may prove that my descriptions are not exaggerated. That of Norman MacKinnon getting into the boat shows that even a young and active St. Kildan cannot always embark with grace and dignity. As a matter of fact, he was the only person who got on board at that place. It was on Stac Levenish, an isolated stack about two miles from St. Kilda, which is always difficult of access, and where, we were told, no one but a St. Kildan has ever landed before. We had got ashore without any special difficulty, but the swell had increased during our stay, and on our attempting to get on board again, whenever the boat came near the rocks, a big wave would hurl her back, at the



WATCHING AN OPPORTUNITY



NOW !

same time drenching the occupants to the skin. When there came a lull, the man holding the rope on shore shouted out, "Faar! faar!" which means comparative quiet between a series of big waves. "Faar, indeed!" indignantly exclaimed Donald MacQuien, pointing at his dripping clothes. Eventually they decided that it was not good enough, and we had to climb to the top of the stack, and get down by a steep and difficult route to a more sheltered spot on the other side. Both photos show rather well how they keep the boat off the rocks with the butt end of an oar.

The following account of their method of landing, written in 1678, so exactly describes what they do now that I reproduce it: "For their ordinary way is, when they come near the rock, they turn the boat and set the side to the shore, two men, one at each end of the boat with two long poles, keeping it off that the waves dash it not so violently against the rock when it rises, at which time only the fellow who is to land makes the attempt. If he miss his landing-place he falls into the sea and the rest of the people hale him aboard; he having before a small rope fastened about his middle to prevent that danger. But when he safely lands (which they seldom miss to

do) the rest of his fellows land one by one, except so many as they leave to attend their little boat, which ordinarily is of six oars. If there be any strangers (as many go from the nearest isles in summer), they must be tied about the middle with a strong rope, and when the men of Hirta have climbed up to the top of the rock (which is about twenty-four fathoms before they get their foot on the grass), they hale up the strangers to them with ropes."

We did not undergo this humiliating process, but no doubt there are places where it might be necessary in the case of people not accustomed to climbing; indeed, I know of one instance where a lady, who had succeeded in landing on the rocks, found that she did not dare attempt to climb the cliffs; she was so terrified that they had to take her back to the boat.

I am also in a position to dispute the same author's statement that "in Burra (Boreray) there is no landing but to the men of Hirta only, in regard to the difficulty thereof, there being but about one foot broad of landing-place, and that only to be attempted when the boat rises." Now, we landed on Boreray, though neither my sister nor I are men of Hirta. There was too much

swell to attempt the ordinary landing-place, and my recollection of the spot where we did land is that the only reasonably level place was occupied by those who had already got ashore, and that I landed on a wet slippery surface inclined at an angle of about 75° . I did not stay there long, and if it had not been for the rope, should undoubtedly have fallen back into the sea.

As a rule, they select a place for landing where the rocks are at an angle of about 60° . This is steep enough to prevent the waves from breaking, and yet not so steep that it will be impossible to find a foothold. When they wish to embark they seem to prefer a much steeper angle. On Soay there is a drop of twenty feet with nothing to catch hold of for either hands or feet, and the last man gets down with the assistance of a rope fastened to a stanchion in the rock above. The photo on page 128 shows one of the Sassenachs hardening his heart for the descent.

The same method is adopted at Stac Lii. I wish I could have got a photo of Finlay MacQuien landing here one day when the tide was very low and there was a good deal of sea on. It was worth seeing. With the assistance of a rope, and a sufficient amount of confidence, any active man

could walk up the side of a house ; but it needs a St. Kildan to get a foothold on an overhanging rock covered with slippery seaweed and draw himself up to the top. The sketch I have done of this feat is really not exaggerated, but I am



A TWENTY-FEET DROP

quite aware that it is not as convincing as a photograph. The first time I landed there the tide was fairly high, and it was possible to get some foothold on the upper part of the rock where it is not quite perpendicular, but now ten or twelve feet of slimy seaweed clinging to the



THE LANDING-PLACE ON STAC LII

absolutely overhanging cliff were exposed, and how Finlay got up is still a marvel to me. Of course the secret of getting up very steep rocks is to trust to the rope and keep your legs at right angles to the surface. I flatter myself that I came down in true St. Kildan style, and so did my sister, but going up we both failed to get any foothold, and were hauled up after the fashion of a sack of potatoes. When I showed Finlay my sketch, he complained that I had made him crooked, and said I ought to have waited till he was in an upright position. I do not think he quite realised the difference between a sketch and a photo, as he declared he never saw me take it.

We had rather an interesting expedition towards the end of our stay, right round St. Kilda and Soay in a boat. I wanted to take notes with a view to mapping out the coast-line, but as there was a very big swell coming in from the west, my work was done under considerable difficulties. What made the row specially interesting was that Niel Ferguson, who speaks English very well, told us the names of many places and why they were so called. Unless he could give the meaning of the word, when my sister's knowledge of Gaelic came in useful, it was almost impossible to make

anything of the sounds that issued from his lips. Consonants often behave rather oddly in Gaelic, though they do to some extent follow rules; but when a St. Kildan pronounces a word, I never have the least idea whether it begins with a *c*, an *f*, or a *p*; all I can detect is a sort of guttural sound. However, “Uamh na Ron” (the Cave of the Seals) was intelligible, and the “Hard Cave” recalled to our minds our night in Boreray, when we discovered that a boat, if not quite so hard as a rock, is not as soft as a feather-bed. Then he pointed out the places where they come down after fulmars, the rock where the great auk used to breed, and told us a delightful tale about “the landing-place of the Englishmen.” Some gentlemen and two ladies landed here and climbed up the cliffs. Presently they caught sight of some of the natives, and, whether they took them for pirates, cannibals, goblins, or for some other noxious animal, incontinently fled. The men got back to their boat in safety, but one lady, for reasons best known to herself, put her petticoats over her head and tumbled over the precipice. The other lady, being basely deserted by her men-kind, and having no desire to emulate the example of her sister in misfortune, hardened her heart and

waited for the savages. Contrary to expectation, they treated her well, and entertained her on the island for seven years, when her friends came and took her away. Why she was left so long without succour is not explained; but when her friends did come they made inquiries as to whether the natives had treated her well, and finding that all had been kind to her with the exception of two, they rewarded the many and killed the two! The narrator of this story stoutly maintained that this had nothing to do with Lady Grange, and, when asked how long ago these interesting events took place, said, "Oh! a hundred years." This, I suppose, is a synonym for prehistoric times.

It is not possible to see St. Kilda and its subordinate islands, or to form any idea of the prowess of the natives as cragsmen, without climbing. A good many of those who have written about the island have obviously not been mountaineers, and have often contented themselves with sitting in a boat and watching the natives ascend the rocks, or have given thrilling accounts of the difficulties at second-hand. When Mr. Seton says that, if the most venturesome member of the Alpine Club were to witness the daring procedure of the St. Kilda cragsmen, he would be compelled to hide

his diminished head, he is obviously overstating the case ; but, on the other hand, when Mr. Dixon states that beyond the celebrated stacks there are comparatively few cliffs that a tolerable climber could not explore unaided by a rope, he unquestionably errs in the other direction. I don't profess to be an expert or venturesome mountaineer, but having done a lot of climbing in the Cuillin Mountains of Skye, and a certain amount in Switzerland, I may fairly claim to be a tolerable climber ; but I should say there are comparatively few cliffs that I should care to explore without the assistance of a rope. The St. Kildans never wear boots when climbing, and I very soon found that I must imitate them in this respect. They walked with the utmost ease and rapidity along smooth sloping ledges where I had to squirm along with the greatest care, looking out for every crack or excrescence that would serve as a resting-place for my nailed soles. When I tried the same ledges in stockings, I found that I could get along something after their fashion ; though, until I had learnt what a thoroughly firm foothold the rough texture of the stockings gave, there was still an inclination to squirm. On dry rocks, probably, bare feet are even better than stockings, also, if possible, more

painful; but for landing and climbing up the slippery places near the sea the natives generally put on a pair of socks.

The fact that there has been no serious accident on the cliffs within the memory of the present inhabitants, is pretty good testimony to their skill as cragsmen and to their prudence as men. They often climb alone in places where most people would not care to follow them; but whenever it is a case of negotiating a really difficult and dangerous cliff, they always go with a companion, and make sure that the rope is sound. Tales are told of hairbreadth escapes and heart-rending accidents in times gone by; and if, as one writer asserts, they were in the habit of entrusting themselves to ropes made of straw or heather, it is not surprising. Not that I believe that for a moment; but probably they were not so well found in the matter of ropes as they are now, and used them longer than was consistent with safety. In Martin's time there were only three ropes on the island, made of cowhide salted, and wrapped round with hempen rope to prevent fraying on the rocks. Horsehair ropes came into use later on; in fact, there are still one or two on the island. I have had one on occasionally for purposes of landing

or embarking ; but, though they are very durable, I would rather trust to good manilla hemp on a difficult climb, as these particular ropes must be getting fairly venerable. The natives are very careful of strangers. They generally use two ropes at any difficult place, and take plenty of time ; but they have not grasped the principle that in coming down rocks the strongest climber should be last on the rope. I have seen them leading down places where a slip on the part of their protégé might have been very awkward, and in the case of inexperienced climbers a slip is always possible.

It is said that, on one occasion, a long time ago, two men were let down on the same rope. Presently, the higher of the two noticed that several strands had given way above him, and seeing that it was a case of one life or two, cut the rope below him. His companion was dashed to pieces, but the slender support on which his own life depended just sufficed to bring him to the top of the cliff and he was saved. It is an awful thing to do. It may be justifiable, and I would not blame any one for doing it ; but I trust that, if I were in a similar situation, I would rather die than do it.

A still more tragic fate befell another young St.



CRACK CLIMBING IN SEARCH OF EGGS

Kildan. The rope broke, and he fell down the cliff, but, unfortunately for him, did not reach the bottom. He managed to cling to a grassy slope just above the final precipice, and here he remained expecting every moment to be rescued. Alas! there was no rope in the island long enough to reach him; there was no possibility of helping him from above, the cliff below was inaccessible: there was nothing to be done. At the end of three days he began singing Gaelic songs, and then—he died.

Most of the climbs in St. Kilda are easier than they look, because the rocks are always firm. Anywhere within 200 feet of the sea the winter waves sweep away all loose stones, and it is almost superfluous to test a handhold; but even above this level there are not many places where the rocks are rotten. Any one looking at Stac Lii would say that it is practically perpendicular on all sides and obviously inaccessible, and yet it is not a difficult climb. The route is up the left-hand sky-line, as shown in the illustration, and, looking at the steepness of the slope, the statement that it is not really difficult seems sufficiently remarkable; but the explanation is that there is a friendly ledge caused by a

basaltic dyke which provides an excellent staircase the greater part of the way, and the only qualification necessary to negotiate this is a good head, while the principal difficulty is to avoid treading on eggs. There are one or two steep bits of

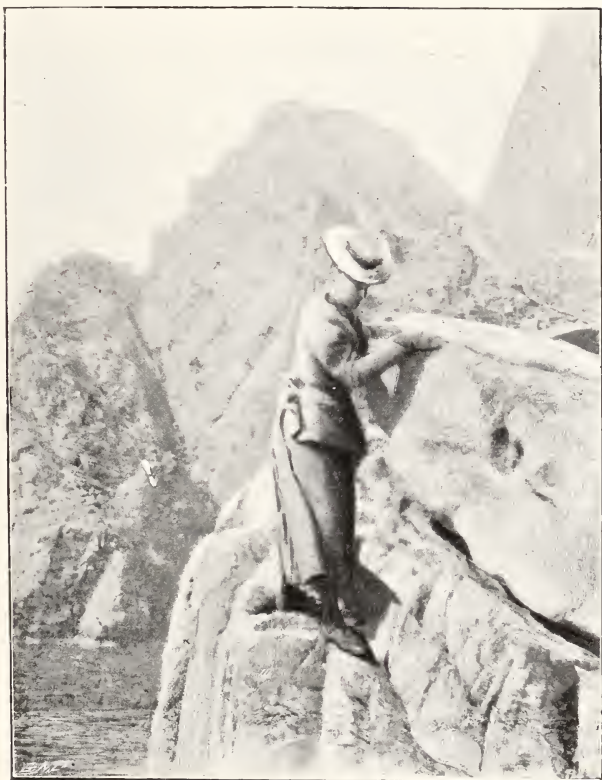


STAC LII

climbing before you reach the ledge, but nothing so difficult as the so-called inaccessible pinnacle in the Cuillins ; and as my sister and I have both been up that, Stac Lii presented no terrors to us. She shares the honour of having attained the top of the pinnacle with, I believe, two other ladies,

but no other member of the better sex has ever attempted Stac Lii.

The ledge along which she is climbing in the



AN AWKWARD CORNER

photo is on Dùn. It is, no doubt, very narrow, but, to a person who does not mind looking down a precipice, as easy as walking along Piccadilly,

and a good deal safer—there are neither omnibuses nor cabs.

The most difficult climb ever undertaken in St. Kilda is Stac na Biorrach.¹ It is not often attempted now. Two men were up it last year, but it is seven or eight years since the previous ascent. In former days apparently they used to climb it every year, but always rather by way of a *tour de force* than in the ordinary course of business. It was looked upon as the test of a St. Kildan hero. Martin describes how at one point the climber has to hold on by one thumb, while he swings his body upwards from one ledge to another. This certainly sounds alarming, but he was not speaking of his own experience. Mr. MacLean, writing in 1838, says that two men climbed it to show their skill to some Englishmen. Having got to the top, they killed an enormous number of birds, “which they tied in immense bundles and flung down into the sea. The parcels rebounded several fathoms, as if threatening to regain the summit, creating at the same time a cloud of blood, which, when it fell, crimsoned the

¹ Stac na Biorrach is shown in the illustration on page 103. It is about 240 feet high, considerably less than half the height of Stac Lii, but it is equally steep on all sides, and there is no ledge to make the climb less difficult than it appears.



FACING THE ORDEAL ON THE LOVER'S STONE

sea." I should have liked to see the parcels rebounding; but I fear this also sounds rather like a second-hand tale.

Another test of a St. Kildan's prowess used to be the trial on the Lover's Stone. This is a custom that has long been discontinued; in fact, the natives deny that it ever existed, and it certainly seems one more suited to the Middle Ages than to the nineteenth century. When a young man wanted to marry, he had to stand in the attitude shown in the illustration on the extreme edge of the Lover's Stone. It is by no means easy to adopt such a position on level ground, where a fall is of no consequence, and to do so in a place where loss of balance meant certain death was certainly a good enough test of nerve and skill. Martin considered that discretion was the better part of valour, and refused to gratify the desire of the natives that he should submit himself to the ordeal. Sensible man! And now I am afraid I must make a confession, and that is, that the place I have drawn is not the Lover's Stone at all. It was pointed out to me as such, and as it seemed extremely appropriate for the purpose, I never doubted it; but after having finished the drawing, I was read-

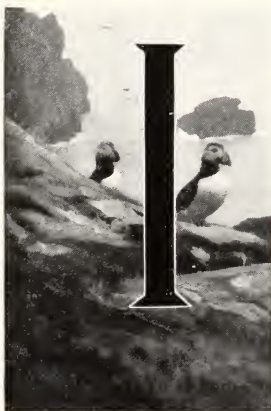
ing Martin's account of the ceremony, and found with dismay that his description undoubtedly applies to another stone on the top of Ruadhval. This would have made an equally good picture, but I have got no sketch or photograph of it, and there is no possibility of getting one in England even with a telephoto lens. However, as the whole scene is imaginary, and as likely as not represents a custom that never existed, I don't know that it much matters.





CHAPTER IV

THE BIRDS OF ST. KILDA



IN the above sketch I have attempted to portray some of the birds that we saw in St. Kilda. I have not included the smaller land-birds, except the wren, and I never succeeded in getting a sketch or photograph of the shearwaters, so they too are absent. If any one finds any difficulty in identifying the species, let him consult a naturalist; but if the naturalist cannot tell him, I am afraid he will have to come to the conclusion that the birds are not well drawn.

The shag has been given the post of honour in the middle, because, when he stands like that with his wings outstretched, he always reminds me of the birds from which the lessons are read in church, and in such a churchy place as St. Kilda this is enough to secure for him a prominent position. The curious-shaped object in the foreground is a mouse, which has been included among the birds because it is the only four-footed wild animal in the place. Wild animal sounds rather ferocious for a mouse; but the only other word I can think of is undomesticated, and that does not please me, besides it is much too long. The shadowy apparition on the left is intended to represent the ghost of the great auk. I put this in because, if there is not the ghost of a great auk in St. Kilda, there ought to be.

The Gaelic name for great auk is *bunnabhua-chuille*. It seems a pity that a bird with a name like that should have become extinct; but as no living specimen has been seen for more than fifty years, there can be no doubt that it is as extinct as the Dodo. The history of its extinction is curious. At first sight it would seem highly improbable that the fact of England's being at war with Denmark could have been an important factor in

the extermination of a species of bird ; but so it was. Owing to this war a privateer under English colours went on a marauding expedition to Iceland in 1807, and, among other exploits, spent some time in killing great auks and destroying their eggs on Geirfuglasker, one of their principal breeding-places ; and owing to this war, in 1810, the inhabitants of the Farøe Islands, being forbidden by the Court of Copenhagen to trade with England, and being, in consequence, nearly reduced to starvation, fitted out a vessel to get food from Iceland. Happening to be becalmed off the coast, they sent boats ashore to collect birds and eggs ; and as the garefowl were unable to fly and but indifferent performers on land, they fell an easy prey to the Farøese, such numbers being slain that the species never was able to recover from the blow. Twenty years later another disaster committed further ravages among the ranks of the devoted tribe, Geirfuglasker disappearing beneath the waves during an earthquake. The few individuals that still remained on some of the skerries off the Icelandic coast were soon destroyed by the natives, and in 1844 the species was extinct.

The place where they used to breed on St. Kilda is still called “the rock of the garefowl,” but their

presence there cannot be remembered even by the oldest inhabitant.

I am not a naturalist, in fact I am tolerably ignorant about birds, but it is impossible to spend any time at St. Kilda without learning something about the St. Kildan sea-birds ; and it is impossible to write about the place without referring to them, or to illustrate the scenery without trying to draw them.

The bird specially identified with St. Kilda is the Fulmar Petrel (*Fulmarus glacialis*). In the headpiece to the chapter it is represented flying above the shag's head. To the uninitiated, it looks very like a gull ; but no one who has once realised the difference could ever mistake the one for the other. The mode of flight is quite different. To watch them on a breezy day floating round and round, gliding slowly up against the wind, then swooping back, balancing themselves all the time with the utmost ease and grace, and hardly ever flapping their wings, gives one an impression of ideal motion, and has often made me long to be a fulmar. I have never seen a drawing that adequately represents a fulmar on the wing, and descriptions of it are often misleading ; for instance, the statement that its flight

is very much like that of a woodcock is fairly astonishing. I should have said that it would be difficult to find two birds more unlike in their mode of flight. Perhaps the gentleman was thinking of the fork-tailed petrel. I have only once seen one of these birds on the wing, and that



FULMAR PETREL ON NEST

was after it had been maintaining a stuffy existence in a man's pocket for several hours, which might conceivably modify its mode of progression; but I can imagine that the statement might be made of this bird, or even of the shearwater, but when it is said of the fulmar, one can only assume that the writer never saw one.

On the approach of an enemy, the fulmar squirts oil at him in self-defence. I suppose the operation is of use to them against some of their foes; and though it does not avail them against the St. Kildan fowler, it is on record that one gallant fulmar succeeded in killing a man by this same process. It was not in St. Kilda, and it was some time ago. The said man, being unacquainted with this little habit of the petrel tribe, was so astonished at receiving a stream of nasty-smelling oil in his face that he fell off the ladder, by means of which he had obtained access to the nest, and was killed. My experience is, that it is a very poor sort of weapon, as the range is so short. I doubt if the stream of oil will carry more than a couple of feet on the level; and so when Martin says that a young fulmar "will be certain to hit any that attack him in the face, though seven paces distant," one must conclude that either the shooting powers of the bird have sadly deteriorated or else that Mr. Martin was wrong. I have often been near enough to cause them anxiety, but was only hit once, and that was by a young one that I was photographing. I had not realised that it was capable of squirting oil, and so went quite close to it without any precaution. The old

birds seem always to fire the first barrel long before the enemy has got within range, and the



YOUNG FULMAR

most alarming thing about them is the preparation of the second barrel. The bird works her head backwards and forwards in her endeavour to bring

up more oil, but she generally fails to get more than a very light charge, which carries even a less distance than the first. As the oil is valuable in various ways—the St. Kildans use it for lighting purposes as well as medicinally—their object is to get hold of the bird before it has had time to eject its oil. The ordinary method of catching fulmars is to snare them with a running noose made of horsehair and gannet quills fastened to the end of a long rod; but when sitting on the nest the natives often catch them in their hands; and for the great raid against the young birds in August no appliances are needed, as they cannot fly away. The fowler descends the cliff with the aid of a rope, or creeps along a ledge till he gets within reach of a bird, and then slips the noose over its head; the struggles of the captive are of use only to the captor; attempts to fly away only tighten the pressure round the neck and prevent the ejection of the oil. In a few moments the victim is drawn up, its neck wrung, and one more fulmar is added to the bundle slung over the man's back.

The people catch fulmars at all times of the year (let no officious person think of prosecuting them for breaking the law; there is a clause in

the Wild Birds' Preservation Act that specially excludes St. Kilda from its operation), but not in any numbers and only in certain places. The main breeding quarters on the cliffs of Connacher are only raided when the young birds are just ready to fly. The beginning of August is the time for the fulmar campaign to begin, an ill-omened month for more than one species of Scottish bird. I had hoped to see something of this performance, but unfortunately the birds were late last year, and I had to leave before the serious business had begun.

Fulmars are the only sea-birds except gulls that remain at St. Kilda during the winter. They apparently take a short holiday in the autumn, I suppose to show the young ones something of the world; but September and October are the only months when they are not to be seen on the rocks of their native home.

The fulmar is the favourite food of the St. Kildans. I believe they like it because it is so oily. Sandy cooked one for us one day, having previously extracted as much oil as possible, and I must say we were agreeably surprised. We had expected something nasty, but it was not nasty. It was somewhat oleaginous, but distinctly tasty.

I don't know that this description is likely to tempt many people to go to St. Kilda in order to sample this delicacy, and I do not mean to say that even with practice I should ever prefer it to a woodcock, but I can quite imagine that one would learn to tolerate, or even to like it.

It always seems to me so fortunate that people have different tastes. We did not grudge the natives their fulmars and puffins; they were willing to supply us with any amount of fish, and had no longings for the mushrooms which we occasionally found; while neither we nor they felt the slightest inclination to interfere with Sandy when he indulged in his favourite dish, *i.e.* a skate which was beginning to go bad. Martin mentions that they used to keep their eggs seven or eight months, "and then they become appetising." I doubt if even the curate immortalised by Mr. Punch would go so far as to say that "parts of them were excellent."

Fulmar's feathers are valuable for stuffing mattresses; but a somewhat serious objection to them is that nothing can get rid of the smell of oil, which, though it can be banished for a time, keeps on turning up, like a bad shilling. It is said that this smell is not agreeable to the jump-

ing and crawling fraternity, but there are people who prefer even these to the smell of fulmar oil; and judging by the descriptions given us of the pleasures of sleeping in a St. Kildan house, it is not an infallible remedy.

The Gannet or Solan Goose (*Sula bassana*) comes next to the fulmar in the estimation of the St. Kildans, being valued for their feathers and as food. I fancy that even a St. Kildan rarely attempts to eat an old solan goose; but when the young birds are full grown, towards the end of August, an expedition is organised to Stac Lii and Boreray where the gannets breed, and thousands are killed to be preserved for food during the winter.

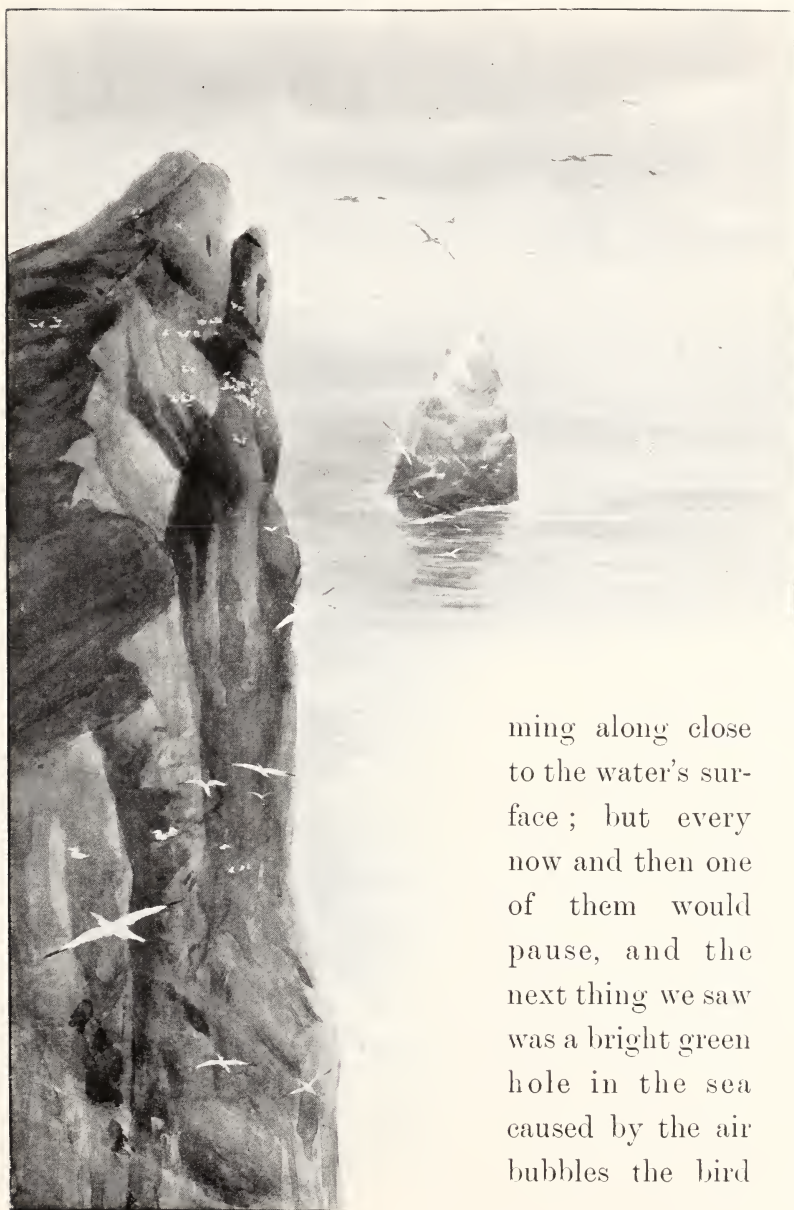
Gannets feed entirely on fish, and their method of fishing is most attractive. Martin says that when after herring, they fly sixty yards high and descend perpendicularly into the water, but after other fish "they descend asquint." I cannot say I ever saw them descend asquint, but I rather like the expression. At whatever angle they may make their plunge, it is most fascinating to watch them, especially from above. One evening we went up to the top of Connacher, and sitting down close to the edge of the cliff, looked down

upon the birds. Below the crowd of fulmars which were sailing round near the top of the precipice, below the puffins which were flitting about with twinkling wings at all elevations, be-



OLD MOTHER GANNET

low the guillemots, razorbills, and kittiwakes which were to be seen at a lower level, a lot of dazzling white specks were moving slowly to and fro: they were gannets fishing. They looked so small that one would have said they must be skim-



ming along close to the water's surface ; but every now and then one of them would pause, and the next thing we saw was a bright green hole in the sea caused by the air bubbles the bird

STAC LII FROM BORERAY

had dragged down with it in its plunge ; and then we knew that they were really flying at a considerable height above the waves. I do not know if there is any authentic record of the greatest height from which they dive. In shallow water they often fly only a few feet above the surface, and I estimated the highest plunge that I saw at about 150 feet. This I should say was exceptional. Gould tells a story about 128 dead gannets being found in some herring-nets which had been lying at a depth of 180 feet ; but as I doubt if they ever remain under water for more than a minute, I suspect that this is a story in the schoolroom sense. Ornithological works are by no means free from statements which partake of the nature of tales ordinarily attributed to fishermen. Audubon, in his description of the gannets in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, says : "The birds rise on the wing with a noise like thunder, and fly off in such a hurried and confused manner as to impede each other's progress, by which thousands are forced downwards and accumulate in banks many feet high." He did not witness this himself, but he appears to believe it. I do not. The top of Stac Lii is about as thick with gannets as any place can be, but though I have seen them leaving it in [thousands, nothing of this



THE TOP OF STAC LII

sort ever occurred. The photo done from the top gives some idea of their numbers. The old ones have deserted the immediate foreground, but a fair crowd is still to be seen along the edge of the rock. They seem to like building their nests as close together as possible. Every available inch is occupied on Stac Lii, and the overflow goes to Stac an Armin and the cliffs of Boreray close by, but not a single gannet breeds in St. Kilda or Soay, or, as far as I know, ever alights on their shores. Stac Lii is certainly a marvellous sight. I went up it twice, the first time when the old birds were sitting on their nests, and again when the young ones were hatched. A few guillemots and fulmars breed on the ledges, but the top is occupied exclusively by solan geese, and the nests are so near one another that it is impossible to avoid treading on them. One wonders how the old birds can find room to sit, much less turn round. They are wonderfully tame, but, unlike the fulmar, and, I suppose, most birds, they seemed less willing to fly away when the young ones were hatched than when they were sitting on their eggs. On my first visit they all departed when we came within three or four yards, with the exception of one old lady, who flapped her wings and talked a great

deal, but would not budge till we had got quite close and had taken several photographs. On my second visit, on July 25th, Finlay MacQuien, who



YOUNG GANNETS

was with us, caught several old birds in his hands ; and I found that I could get as near as I liked to take their portraits. The photo of old Mother Gannet was done at a distance of about three feet.



PUFFINS ON THE SLOPES OF BOREAV

The young were of all sizes : some, little naked black things only just hatched, others nearly as big as the adult birds, and, though still covered with down, capable of giving a good nip with their beaks.

Audubon says that the feathers on the breast of the solan goose are convex in form and consequently very difficult to draw. Certainly neither his drawing nor any other that I have seen gives much idea of this convexity, but it comes out very well in the photo on p. 158. I should also like to call attention to the old lady's expression. An imaginative person might infer a great deal as to the character and temperament of the gannet from a study of her face and the pose of her head.

The Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) is frequently seen all round the coasts of Great Britain, but I think there must be more of them in St. Kilda than anywhere else. The natives kill thousands every year, but owing to the decrease in the value of feathers, nothing like the 90,000 that, according to Mr. Sands's estimate, were killed in 1876 ; and now they are distinctly on the increase.

There are countless numbers on the slopes of Dùn, infinitely more on Boreray, and yet one

must go to Soay to realise what a crowd of puffins means. The photograph only shows seven. However we came to the conclusion some little time



PUFFINS ON SOAY

ago that the camera does not always tell the truth, and really there are many more than that. To see them rising from the stones as you come

near is a sight worth going to St. Kilda to see. It is absolutely bewildering; the never-ending stream of birds passing by always in the same direction makes one quite giddy. I suppose if they did not have rules of the road the number of collisions would be something awful. As it is, they sometimes collide with a gull or fulmar who tries to cross their track, or with one of their own tribe who is trying to get into the stream. I don't wish to convey the idea that they fly in one direction and never come back. They come back all right, but by quite a different route much farther from the cliff.

They live in holes burrowed in the ground, mostly on steep grass slopes. If they can find a rabbit-hole and get the opportunity of ejecting the proprietor thereof, they are all the better pleased; but as there are no rabbits in St. Kilda they have to execute their own architecture themselves. The slopes of Dùn, where we were first introduced to the bird-life of St. Kilda, are honey-combed by their burrows. Their wings being very short, they are but indifferent performers in the air, and look much more in their element when dancing about on the waves. They leave their holes in a downward slanting direction, as

they cannot rise until they have got some way on, and their powers of steering are also rather limited at first. One of them, starting about on a level with my head, flew against my sister's hat and nearly knocked her down; and until you get used to it, a puffin scuttling out of a burrow right under your feet is almost as alarming as a cock grouse who has been squatting and suddenly finds that he must quit if he does not want to be trodden on. They are quaint little birds, and look absurdly consequential as they stand side by side on the rocks, turning their heads sideways to have a look at the intruder, and now and then standing on tiptoe to shake their wings. They also look sufficiently ridiculous when they are flying, with their little red legs trailing behind them; or when they are going to alight, with their necks stretched forward and their legs straddled wide apart.

As far as appearance goes, one would say that the fulmar is a gentleman and the puffin a snob. There is something eminently aristocratic about the one and a distinct suspicion of vulgarity about the other, but I am not sure that their characters and habits bear this out. Tales are told of excessive greediness and ungentlemanlike love of



"THEY ARE QUAIN'T LITTLE BIRDS"

blubber when a party of fulmars is in the neighbourhood of the carcase of a whale ; but with the exception of burglarious entrance into rabbit-holes, I know of no special case against the puffin : in fact, they are said to express sympathy for a



THE REJECTED SUITOR

wounded brother, and this is a trait not usual among birds. Certainly, in the photo above, one of them seems to be saying something nasty ; it almost looks as if he must be the accepted lover of the lady on the right and is telling his rejected

rival to go about his business in no measured terms; but maybe he was only talking about me and my camera.

They are anything but shy birds. I wanted to get some photos at close range, and thought that the best chance would be to place the camera so as to command a favourite rock, and then, concealing myself behind a stone, to free the shutter by means of a pneumatic india-rubber tube; but I found that they were much more afraid of the camera than of me. They had seen a man before, but did not know what to make of that strange-looking black thing. They would come and sit by the dozen within a yard or two of me, but I had to wait a long time before one would venture within range of the camera.

As the time draws near for their departure, it becomes more difficult to get near them. The photo of Finlay MacQuien catching puffins was done quite at the end of July, and the birds were getting so scarce in Dùn and were so shy, that it took him the best part of two hours to make the bag up to ten brace. I tried my hand at it, but could never get the noose within a yard of them. This was disappointing, as when we had tried once before on Boreray, both my sister and

I had secured a puffin at the first attempt. The natives talk to them all the time in puffin language, and while the bird is trying to make out what they are saying, he finds his neck has got



CATCHING PUFFINS

entangled in the noose. The puffin's vocabulary is said to consist of "Oh! Oh!" but I don't think this expresses the sound. It struck me as being more like the lowing of a distant cow, and would be better rendered by the French "on."

The St. Kildans eat puffins when they cannot get fulmars. "Faute de grive on mange merle." We never sampled one, as the accounts we heard were not encouraging, but "the boys" used to eat them, and declared they were awfully good.

The members of the Gull tribe to be seen at St. Kilda are the common and herring gulls, the great and lesser black-backed, and the kittiwake. I am rather proud of the photo of young great black-backed gulls (*Larus marinus*). It is so difficult to get young birds in a good situation and in satisfactory attitudes. I found them quite by chance. One day when I was climbing down a cliff in search of a spot from which to watch the waves, I suddenly heard a great *swish* above my head, and looking up, saw a great black-backed gull rising into the air after her swoop. A short search revealed the nest containing three young ones. One of these made up its mind that it would rather die than be photographed, and so fell over the cliff; but I took a couple of shots at the other two, in spite of the attacks of the mother, who kept flying overhead, saying, "Tut, tut" (for all I know this may be a bad swear-word in gull language), and occasionally swooping down within a yard of my head with a "Ha!



Young Great Black-backed Gulls.

ha! ha! I frightened him that time." It really was most alarming. I was standing in a very insecure attitude at the extreme edge of a frightful precipice, and if the gull had really come at me, the swoop of a great bird like that could not have failed to knock me over the cliff. I did not feel sure that she would confine herself to demonstrations, and took my photos in fear and trembling. Fortunately, Robert Gray's story illustrative of the wonderful strength of these gulls did not occur to me, or I must have lost my balance from sheer fright. He says that a great black-backed gull, having swallowed a bait



ONE OF THE YOUNG GULLS
THREE WEEKS LATER

which was attached to a seven-pound weight by a rope 37 feet long, pulled the whole thing up from the bottom. He does not add "and flew away with it," which seems a pity. It gives a finish to the story, and is no more difficult to believe. I am inclined to think that my gull was really rather pleased at having one youngster

the less to feed, as she was much less savage on subsequent occasions. We used often to go down and see how the little ones were getting on, and by the time the second photo was taken they were almost able to fly; in fact, one of them did flutter down to a point some fifty feet lower, where he was safe from the eye of the camera.

It is not very easy to get within reach of a young kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), as they breed low down on perpendicular or preferably overhanging precipices. I did succeed in getting on to a ledge where a young one was sitting, but as there was barely room for me and the young bird, and I could neither stoop nor turn round, while a step forward would have taken me into the sea 200 feet below, I could do no more than look at it. Eventually I did succeed in getting a photograph of an old bird with her young in the nest, but they came out so small that it was useless to attempt a reproduction of it.

The sketches of herring-gulls (*Larus argentatus*) were mostly done at the Zoological Gardens. It is not easy to get near enough the wild birds to draw them comfortably. The Zoo is a delightful place. It is rather far away, but it is worth walking two or three miles if only to see the

king penguin taking his morning constitutional. He walks like a very rheumaticky old gentleman, and to see this magnificent bird, with its beautiful



HERRING GULLS

plumage and stately appearance, waddling along in such a ridiculous fashion is really most ludicrous. While I was watching the gulls a military

band went past just outside, and this seemed to bother a cormorant who was living in the same enclosure. He rushed about with his head in the air trying to make out where the noise came from, and at last, having failed to elucidate the mystery, dived under water. The gulls were mostly asleep, some standing on one leg, some sitting on the ground, but all with their heads twisted round into their backs, and most of them with at least one eye open. Occasionally one would move and collide with another, then there was great commotion and a sort of "general post," each bird hopping, still on one leg, to another position. One of them apparently suffered from weak ankles and generally tumbled down on these occasions.

The Guillemot (*Uria bruennichi*) is a foolish-looking bird, and I am not sure that it is not quite as big a fool as it looks. Curiously enough, my photo was done from exactly the same spot as one of Mr. Kearton's in "With Nature and a Camera," an absolutely undesigned coincidence, as I did not discover the fact until I compared the two.

They lay their eggs on the bare rock, often on ledges so narrow that there is only just room for the bird to stand, and if they fly away in a hurry

the egg frequently tumbles off and is dashed to pieces on the stones below. This does not seem



GUILLEMOTS

a very wise method of procedure. Another ridiculous habit of the guillemots is perpetual

bowing. They stand upright on the ledges and make polite inclinations of the head, often being packed so close that there is barely room for the bow. Sometimes their heads collide, and then politeness ceases for a space. I think the right-hand bird in the photograph has been caught in the act of executing a bow, but no photograph or drawing can give much idea of this operation.

Another characteristic which justifies their title of the "Foolish Guillemot" is the stupid way in which they allow themselves to be caught. They are driven from their favourite resting-places overnight, and the fowler, armed only with a white cloth over his breast, awaits their return in the early morning. They come and alight, not only within reach, but frequently on his person, mistaking the white cloth for one of their guano-covered ledges, and in this way dozens can be killed.

They are not good to eat, but a certain number are taken for the sake of the feathers, and there is a considerable traffic in guillemots' eggs when the tourists arrive in the steamer.

One does not often get the chance of photographing a black guillemot (*Uria grylle*), and as this one has rather a picturesque background of

tumbling waters in Dún passage, I reproduce it. It is curious how names of birds vary in different places and at different times. I was looking at Willoughby's "Ornithology" the other day, and found a description that could only be meant for the black guillemot, but it was called the "sea-



BLACK GUILLEMOT

turtle." Why turtle? Another name for it was the Greenland Dove. In the same work the figure of the great auk was labelled "Penguin Worm," which struck me as a curious title; but it occurred to me afterwards that "Worm" probably stands for "Wormius," who was an authority on birds in those days—*i.e.* in the seventeenth century.

The Razorbill (*Alca torda*) is very like the guillemot in size and appearance, the chief difference being in the shape of the bill, and this is obvious in the illustrations. These birds always remind me of an ecclesiastical dignitary, and a slight stretch of the imagination will reveal the



RAZORBILLS

three depicted in the photograph as parson, reader, and clerk in one of the old-fashioned three-decker pulpits. The clerk is in the act of saying "Amen."

Shags or Skarts (*Phalacrocorax graculus*) are fairly common in St. Kilda, but are not killed by

the natives, probably because they are unable to get near them. I have often tried to stalk them with the camera, but never could get nearer than eight or ten yards. One winter, when I was in Skye, I used to shoot them when I got the chance, because, if they are buried for two or three days



RAZORBILLS AND SHAGS

to get rid of the fishy taste, they make excellent soup. My sister and I used to pursue them in a boat, without much success. By rowing hard as soon as they dived, I could get within shot by the time they came to the surface, but down they went again before I could get hold of the

gun, and when I stood in the bows and let my sister row, she could not pull hard enough to bring me within range.

They are very much at home in the water and do not seem to mind the roughest seas. I saw one in Dùn passage one day calmly swimming about in the eddies of green swirling water. When an extra big wave came roaring along, threatening to overwhelm the bird with its foaming crest, the skart quietly dived and came up unconcernedly on the other side. I discovered several nests containing young birds, but they were always hidden away behind stones where there was not sufficient light to take a photograph.

The Oyster-catcher (*Hæmatopus ostralegus*), so called, on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, because it does not feed on oysters, is a pretty bird, beautifully marked with black and white, and with a long red bill. I rather like their shrill cry, "Wheep! wheep!" but they have yet to learn that one may have enough of a good thing. They go on saying it so often that it becomes wearisome and eventually maddening. Alec Ferguson, the proud possessor of the only gun in the island, told me that it was not easy to shoot them, as they were so shy, and that

nothing less than No. 4 shot would be of any use. I wanted to get one for pictorial purposes, and I must admit that I expended two No. 5 cartridges at birds on the ground without effect. However, as soon as I got a shot at one on the



OYSTER-CATCHERS

wing he came down all right. Probably my gun was rather better than Alec's. One day in the boat I saw him make several attempts to let it off, but I do not think that he ever succeeded in overcoming the reluctance of the charge to leave the barrel, and unquestionably it takes

more shot to kill a bird when its body is protected by the wing feathers than when it is flying. Talking of shooting birds on the ground reminds me of a story told about a French tutor. He went out one day to potter after rabbits, and presently returned triumphant, waving a bunny over his head and screaming with delight. Upon being asked if he had killed it running, he said, "Oh non ! il était assis, parfaitement." Another rather ridiculous scene occurred some years ago in the Fens. A wounded hare swam across one of the fen "rivers," as they are euphemistically called. I blazed at it in the water without much effect, but we eventually killed it as it was crawling up the opposite bank. Then the question arose how we were to get it. The nearest bridge was a mile and a half distant, we had an idiot of a dog who funked the water, and it looked as if we must either swim or leave the hare where it was. The keeper threw the dog in several times, but the only result was that he scrambled out on our side and deluged us with a spray of dirty water, and we were just turning away when a man turned up on the other side. Then we reckoned that our quarry was as good as in the bag. The water

was not thirty feet broad, and surely any fool could throw a hare ten yards. The animal hurtled through the air and fell in the water about eighteen inches in front of the retriever's nose. You would have thought that any creature with four legs would have made some effort to get at it. Not so "Sam." He stood there barking, and watched it slowly sink to the bottom. We did not shoot him, in fact he continued a useless existence for several years; but when he died, his epitaph was short and to the point. The first line consisted of "Here lies 'Sam,'" and the second expressed what he was worth in a word that rhymes to Sam.

The Eider Duck (*Somateria mollissima*) is the only member of the duck tribe that lives in St. Kilda. Apparently the drakes go off for a lark as soon as incubation begins. I never saw one after the first ten days of our stay, though several ducks were always to be seen in Village Bay, and a colony of a dozen or more lived over in the glen. This seems rather a shame, as there are plenty of enemies about, and it must take the mother all her time to look after her little ones. One lady successfully reared three young ones in Village Bay. They were getting quite big by the time

we left. I watched them one day trying to keep on the stone where mamma was sitting. The waves just washed over it, but sometimes with a struggle they managed to hold on. When an extra big wave came, they were invariably washed off and apparently were dashed with violence on to the boulders. However, they always came up smiling, and clambered up by the side of their mother only to meet the same fate in a few minutes.

I am afraid that the Fork-tailed Petrel (*Procellaria leuchorrhoea*) and the Stormy Petrel (*Procellaria pelagica*) are getting rare on St. Kilda, and unless the natives exercise greater moderation in taking the eggs, there is a danger that they may be exterminated. The number of eggs taken by naturalists or bought by tourists on the steamers would do no harm, but when trade collectors give an order for as many as can be obtained it becomes serious. Last summer the St. Kildans took all the nests that they could find, and when the birds laid their second egg another raid was made on them. It is not very easy to find a petrel's nest among the thousands of puffin burrows, but if it is worth their while, the natives will spend the night on the slopes of

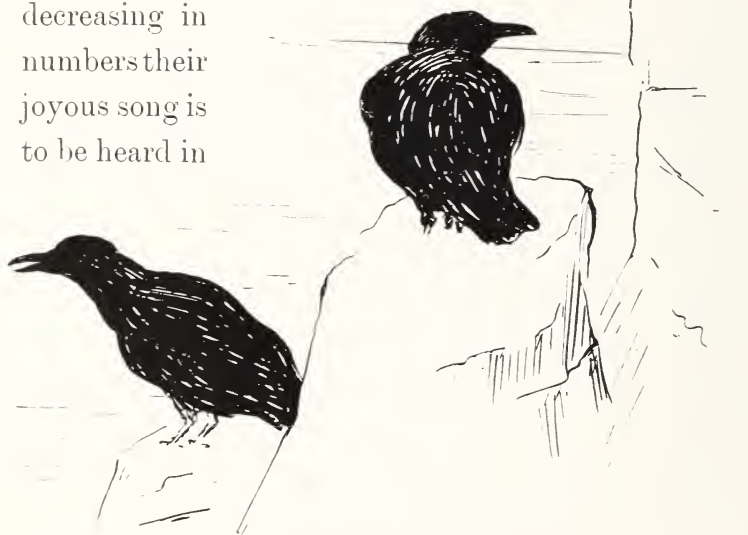
Boreray or Soay and watch the petrels go into their holes, and in this way they take a great number of eggs.

The Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus anglorum*) is fairly common in St. Kilda, and we occasionally saw the Greater Shearwater (*Puffinus major*). Alec Ferguson declared that he had found a greater shearwater's nest on Levenish, but that the egg had unfortunately got broken in getting into the boat. The nesting-place of this bird has never been discovered in Great Britain, and so his statement was received with considerable incredulity.

I never saw any members of the hawk tribe, but the peregrine is said to build on a pinnacle of rock just below the top of Mullach Bith. It was on this spot that I did the sketch of the ravens (*Corvus corax*). This is generally considered to be a very shy bird, but the pair depicted were sitting on a rock within twenty yards of me, and did not seem to mind having their portraits done at all. One of them came wheeling over me to see if I was likely to be dangerous, but finding that I was armed only with a pencil, without even a camera, he seemed to be satisfied and resumed his pose on the rock.

There are more hooded crows in the island than the natives altogether like.

Starlings are numerous, and wheatears, rock pipits, and tree sparrows are frequently to be seen. Constant war is waged against the wren, as their eggs have a considerable market value; but though they are decreasing in numbers their joyous song is to be heard in



RAVENS

all parts of the island, and I do not think there is any immediate danger of their extermination.

We occasionally saw a party of whimbrels flitting about by the shore uttering their plaintive cry, and a covey of golden plover used to live on the top of Mullach Mor.

Johnnie MacKenzie, to whom I am indebted for the identification of many of these birds, was sceptical about the existence of golden plover, as he had never seen them there; but we often heard their cry. Once I came upon them suddenly and got within twenty yards, and "the boys" shot one and ate it; so I think the evidence is fairly strong!

One day we came upon a brent goose on the top of Cambargh, and I believe I once saw a snipe.

Fowling is the principal occupation of the natives of St. Kilda. Cattle, sheep, crops, and fish are of only secondary importance; the birds come first. Snaring fulmars on the cliffs is more amusing than running after sheep or drawing up heavy lines from the bottom of the sea, and a fulmar, young gannet, or even a puffin is considered preferable to mutton as food. They catch birds for the sake of their meat, oil, and feathers, and the act of catching them is their only sport. It is this that makes them love their island home. If it were not that they can rival one another on the rocks they would be less unwilling to seek ad-

ventures in the outer world. Martin describes how the islanders in his time played shinty on the sands; how they sang and "danced mightily." Now they are members of the Free Kirk, and



THE FOWLER AT WORK

neither dance, nor sing, nor play games. Their only recreation is going on the rocks.

Their methods of bird-catching are interesting and curious, but not so remarkable as some of the

descriptions of them. Very few of the writers on St. Kilda have spent more than a few days there, some only a few hours; and though most of them saw exhibitions of the prowess of the natives on the cliffs, such as any tourist who visits the island may see, no one, as far as I can make out, has been an eye-witness of the serious business of the St. Kildan fowling expeditions, and most of the accounts are written from hearsay.

One writer says that they kill fowls in the mist by lying flat on their backs by the doors of their houses and laying bare their breasts, "which when the fowls perceive they sit upon them and are presently catch'd." The only fowl they would be likely to secure in this way would be the common or garden hen, but no doubt the gentleman was thinking of their method of catching guillemots already referred to. Another variation of the custom is described by Morgan as follows: "A man with a white cloth about his neck is let down from the summit of the crags at night and hangs like the weight of a clock immediately before the nests. The birds, attracted by the bright colour, mistake the intruder for a projecting portion of rock and settle upon him in great numbers." It is obvious that the pendulum episode is either a

picturesque exaggeration on the part of the writer, or else that his informant was trying to "pull his leg."

Many people have a vague idea that fulmars are caught in a noose, and that they are made to disgorge their oil into a vessel; and this will account for the schoolboy's answer, in a general information paper, that the St. Kildans catch these birds by throwing a noose, to which a bottle is attached, with such accuracy over their heads that when they become aware of their danger and disgorge the oil which is secreted in their tubular nostrils, the oil is caught in the bottle, while they are caught in the noose. It would indeed require accuracy to perform such a feat. "A little learning is a dangerous thing." It used to be stated that fulmars secreted the oil *from* their tubular nostrils, and this accounts for the expression secreted *in* their nostrils, his idea being, I suppose, that this special form of nasal orifice was given to them as a sort of secret hiding-place for their ammunition. How should a schoolboy know that "secrete" has any other meaning than "to hide"?

The account given by Buchanan in 1773 of their method of catching gannets is rather nice.

It reminds me of the good old-fashioned plan of putting salt on a bird's tail. He says: "The fowler puts a white towel on his breast, and during the night crawls along the ledges towards the sleeping birds. When he gets near the sentinel the fowler gently tickles one of his legs, which he lifts and places on the palm of his hands. He then gently tickles the other, which, in like manner, is lifted and placed on his hands. He then no less artfully than insensibly moves the sentinel near the first sleeping goose, which he pushes with his finger, on which he awakes, and finding the sentinel standing above him he immediately falls a-fighting him for his supposed insolence. This alarms the whole camp, and instead of flying off they all begin to fight, while the common enemy begins in good earnest to twist their necks." It is true that they catch gannets at night, and that they have to kill the sentinel before there is any chance of slaughtering the rest, but the leg-tickling business is an addition.

There is a small cave on Stac Lii where they can get shelter during their raids against the solan geese. It did not look a particularly attractive place of abode, very small and low, with an uneven and uncompromisingly hard-looking floor covered

with bits of decaying fish, and the excrements of all kinds of birds ; but I suppose it is better than



CATCHING A GANNET

nothing. There is always a chance that they may be detained on the rock for days by bad weather, and so some sort of shelter is a necessity.

I believe that when they kill the young gannets towards the end of August they generally spend



THE GANNET CAUGHT

some little time there. For one reason the young birds vary considerably in development; also if

they put it off too long they might find it impossible to effect a landing when the auspicious moment arrived.

I should very much like to see the slaughter of young gannets, or the raid against the fulmars, but we were obliged to leave St. Kilda early in August, and to stop on until the last steamer of the year would be somewhat rash. It might mean spending a whole winter there.



CHAPTER V

ST. KILDA IN THE FUTURE



WHAT will happen to St. Kilda in the future? Will it remain the lonely island home of a primitive people and continue to afford a charming refuge for those who wish for a while to escape from the rush of life? Will

it be deserted by the present inhabitants and become the breeding-place of yet greater numbers of birds than are to be found there now? Or, lastly, *Di meliora!* will it be invaded by the purveyor of health or amusement, and shall we see a hydro-pathic establishment erected on the slopes of Connacher and an esplanade round the shores of Village Bay?

It is said to be rash to prophesy unless you know, but without indulging in prophecy it may

be interesting to consider some of the social and economic problems connected with St. Kilda, and note some of the possibilities of the future.

The little community has not altered much in the course of the last 200 years, but I think there are signs that greater changes may be expected. In the past the inhabitants have lived an entirely isolated life; they have been uneducated, and have had practically no intercourse with educated people. Martin says that writing seemed an extraordinary mystery to them: "They cannot conceive how it is possible for any mortal to express the conceptions of his mind in such black characters upon white paper." In 1830 only one woman could read and write a little, and as late as 1877 none of the natives understood anything but Gaelic. Now, all the rising generation talk English quite well, they have far more general information, many more opportunities of conversing with educated people, and much greater facilities for leaving the island.

Hitherto almost all transactions have been carried on by barter, but it seems hardly possible that the existing economic relations between landlord and tenant can continue very much longer. At a time when there was no communi-

cation between the island and the mainland, except by means of the factor's boat, it was doubtless the best arrangement that the islanders should hand over all their produce in return for any necessities or luxuries they required. It



THE BULL GOING SOUTH

was the only way by which such things could be obtained, unless the St. Kildans had taken their goods to market in their own boat, and the absence of any sort of harbour made this practically impossible.

At the present day, when steamers visit St.

Kilda about once a fortnight during the summer months, and trawlers going there to fish provide occasional opportunities of communicating with the outer world at all times of the year, this antiquated system of barter has ceased to be satisfactory. It is bad for the landlord and bad for the people. It is bad for the landlord, because the island, instead of being a source of profit, is a source of loss. It is bad for the people, because it tends to make them lazy and thriftless, and puts many temptations in their way. They find that everything they want is supplied to them whether they pay for it or not. This perhaps is slight exaggeration. If they were to ask for a pipe of port or a boa-constrictor, these articles would not be sent to them; there is a limit even to a landlord's generosity. The plan is, that when the factor goes in June the people all make out a list of what they want in the way of meal, tea, fishing-tackle, implements, &c., and unless anything seems unreasonable to the landlord, all the articles are sent out by the last steamer in August, and are paid for in cloth, oil, feathers, &c., when the agent revisits the island in the following June. Thus the landlord has to supply goods for which he is not paid till nine months later, and then he is paid in

other goods, which he has to sell before he gets the money. All losses caused by accidents fall upon him. If, in the process of landing, a bag of meal or a barrel of salt is damaged by sea water the landlord bears the loss. If the people get in arrears with their rent, which the St. Kildans are quite as prone to do as other tenants, or fail to pay for goods that have been supplied to them, they are not evicted nor are the necessities they require for the coming year denied to them, and yet people write to the papers to say that it is owing to the rapacity of the landlord that the system of barter is continued. A reporter from a Radical Glasgow paper went up in the same steamer as we did; and the result of his investigations during the few hours he spent on the island arrived by the next post a fortnight later. The factor translated the article to the people, and asked them how they would like it if the landlord were to follow the advice of their would-be friends. I was pleased to find that they quite realised that they had got a most generous landlord, and that any alteration in the present system would not be to their pecuniary advantage. Can no plan be devised that would be for their moral advantage? What is wanted is that they should be

less dependent on the landlord, that they should learn to appreciate the advantages of thrift and the penalties of idleness; to become more self-reliant and to develop the resources of their island of their own accord. It is so easy to criticise existing conditions, so difficult to formulate a new scheme; so easy to say what is wanted, so difficult to suggest how it is to be obtained. But I feel sure that the resources of the island should be sufficient to provide an ample livelihood to the inhabitants without being a tax upon the landlord.

Two hundred years ago St. Kilda supported a population of 180, and in addition supplied provisions for several months to the Steward and his followers. Seeing that his retinue often consisted of fifty or sixty people, many of them the poorest in the parish, whom he took with him to be recuperated by the good living of St. Kilda, it does not seem as if the place can be over-populated at the present day. A hundred years ago Lord Brougham estimated that the island could easily support 1500 people, and only ten years ago they used to pay a rent which, if it did not give much interest on capital, at any rate more than covered expenses; and yet now, though the money coming

into the island from visitors and from the sale of cloth, socks, eggs, &c., to tourists must more than make up for the depreciation in the price of wool, oil, and feathers. I believe the MacLeod would absolutely be a gainer if he were to give St. Kilda away. The rent demanded is small enough—30s. for croft and house; 9d. a head for grazing sheep on the main island, 6d. on Boreray; 7s. for a cow, 3s. 6d. for two-year-old cattle, and 2s. 4d. for stirks; but I suppose they have been told by agitators that this is too much, and they have got into the way of not paying. Some of them have even got an idea that they would like the Commissioners to go and lower their rents, and probably nothing except the fulfilment of their wish would convince them that the rent would as likely as not be raised, not lowered.

There are many ways in which St. Kilda could be made more productive. Take the fishing industry. There are swarms of fish round their shores, but hitherto the greater part of the harvest of the sea has been reaped by strangers. It has been a favourite fishing-ground for steam trawlers for many years. We saw numbers of them at work round the shores during our visit. It is illegal to trawl within the three-mile limit, but they give

the St. Kildans presents of coal and other luxuries in the hope that they won't report them ; but even if they do report them the Scotch Office will not take action unless the evidence is very strong, and in the case of a conviction the fine is so small that it has practically no deterrent effect. The minister told me that a trawler, which visited St. Kilda a few years ago, before the fishing-grounds had been spoilt by their frequent raids, had made £10,000 in one season. However much this may be exaggerated, the fact that it is stated is enough to show that the chance of a £50 fine will not keep them away. There seems to be great difference of opinion as to the amount of harm done to the fishing by trawlers. When, as not infrequently happens during their incursions close in shore, they destroy the nets and lines of the local fishermen, there is obviously nothing to be said for them ; but when the fishermen say that their trawl nets dragging along the bottom destroy the spawn and permanently injure the fishing of the district, one must put against it the statement of scientific men that the spawn is hatched far out at sea and not on the sea-bottom at all, and also the result of experiments carried out in various parts of Scotland which go to show

that areas which had been continually trawled were not less prolific in fish than other areas where no trawler had been allowed to go for many years. Whether or no trawlers are injurious to the fishing industry, it cannot have made much difference to the St. Kildans up to now, as they have not been wont to devote a great amount of time to fishing. I must admit, however, that last summer they worked hard at it. They were out almost every night when weather permitted, they used up all their salt and filled all their receptacles with fish; but I am rather inclined to suspect that the acquisition of a new boat by some members of the community had something to do with this fishing mania. It created rivalry between the crews. If one boat went out, the others must needs go too. They never seemed satisfied with their catch. A boat would often come back with thirty or forty ling besides halibut and congers, but it was always, "Very bad," "Very few fish," and the blame was laid on the trawlers.

If one comes to think of it their slackness about fishing is not altogether surprising. In most fishing stations there is some sort of harbour where a good sea-going vessel can be kept at anchor; the St. Kildans seldom venture to leave a boat out all

night, and the labour of hauling it up above high-water mark adds materially to the *désagréments* of boating expeditions. Half the population generally turns out to see a boat come in, and women and children all lend a hand at the rope. However, this will soon be a thing of the past, as representations made to the Congested Districts Board have resulted



HAULING UP THE BOAT

in a scheme for making a shelter-place for their boats; in fact, an engineer is spending the winter in St. Kilda in order to superintend the natives in the labour of excavation. The violence of the winter storms precludes the possibility of building a breakwater, and it has been determined that the only feasible plan is to blast an L-shaped passage in the rock where the boats will find shelter in

moderate weather, and where it will be possible to land goods on many days when it would be out of the question under existing circumstances. The St. Kildans were very keen to have the pier, but whether they will make the most of it and devote themselves more to fishing remains to be seen.¹

The question of fuel is another matter in which there is room for improvement. At present they are in the habit of burning turf—a very wasteful process. It burns away very quickly, and the fire is produced at the expense of the pastures. Some of the grass in St. Kilda affords as good pasturage for sheep as is to be found anywhere in Scotland; but in all parts of the island one comes across bare patches, sometimes large strips from which the turf has been systematically taken, sometimes merely holes from which just one sod has been removed. There is no excuse for this, as there is plenty of excellent peat. The reasons they give

¹ Since writing this I have heard that the pier has made substantial progress, and though not yet completed has already been of material assistance to the islanders. During the past winter one of the boats was caught in a storm. They were rescued by a trawler, and managed to bring the boat into the harbour, though it would have been quite impossible to land anywhere else. Also, when the *Dunara Castle* made her first trip, the new shelter enabled them to land goods and passengers in spite of a south-easterly gale.

for burning turf instead of peat are, that it is less trouble to dig, lighter to carry, and that they cannot dry the peats in their damp climate. As it is mostly found on the tops of the hills at a considerable distance from the village, this sounds a fairly plausible excuse; but as a matter of fact the heavier peat would burn proportionately longer than the lighter turf, and it would not really be necessary to transport any greater weight. As to the drying, all I can say is that if peats can be dried in Skye they can be dried in St. Kilda. The carrying is done for the most part by the women, and a fairly obvious improvement would be the importation of a few ponies or donkeys. There used to be horses in St. Kilda. Martin mentions that there were eighteen in his time; indeed it is within the last fifty years that these useful animals have been banished from the island. It was said that they were of little use and that they spoilt the grass. Probably the real reason of their banishment was that those who had not got a pony were jealous of those who had, and complained that they spoilt the common pasture. The obvious plan would be to have a couple of ponies belonging to the community, the only objection to this being that it is then everybody's,



A TROUBLESOME LOAD

and consequently nobody's, business to look after them, and there might be a danger of their not being properly fed in the winter, as is said sometimes to happen to the bull.

What one would like to see would be some effort on the part of the people to carry out improvements for themselves. They could quite well afford to buy a pony or two, but they have got so accustomed to having everything given to them that I doubt if they could be persuaded to do so.

Whether more might be done in the way of cultivation is open to question. The amount of cultivated land is now very limited, and the people say that when they can get meal, &c., from the South it pays better to let the grass grow than to try cultivating corn or potatoes. There is probably some truth in this; but if they save themselves the trouble of cultivating the ground on the plea that they can get the products cheaper from the South, surely they ought to pay for these things when they get them!

I suspect that this saving themselves trouble has a good deal to do with their remissness about cultivation. Macaulay says that they were most industrious in his time, digging the ground well

and using plenty of manure. with the result that their crops were very good. He mentions that the barley he saw in St. Kilda was more forward than any he had seen elsewhere. At the present time their agricultural efforts are not at all worthy of praise. Their crops looked poor and uncared for, and showed an utter want of system. Lord Brougham scoffs at their ideas of cultivation, saying that he saw barley fields twenty-five feet by three feet ; but I can cap that, as I came across a barley field that was certainly not more than two square yards in extent. It is quite true that the climate is adverse to agriculture ; the squalls that sweep down off the hills, and the spray that is liable to be blown all over the island, must make the returns of cultivation very precarious, and the place is certainly better adapted for rearing sheep and cattle. But let them pay more attention to their flocks and herds. Let them learn to shear their sheep like Christians, not tear the wool out in handfuls or hack it off with pocket-knives as they do at present ; and let them do it systematically, not allow half the sheep to go unshorn, or rather unplucked as they did last year. The slopes of Boreray were white with bits of wool that had

fallen off the sheep, and the animals themselves had a most unkempt and slovenly appearance, bare in some parts and shreds of wool clinging to them in others.¹

Then let them learn to catch their sheep in a reasonable manner. There are plenty of dogs on the island, but they seem to be of precious little use. They have no idea of running round a flock of sheep to drive them in a certain direction. This is done by the people. The only use of the dogs is to run down an individual sheep, and this they

¹ One generally finds that there is something to be said for any local custom, and the plucking of sheep is no exception to the rule. In the Shetland Islands, where the sheep are very similar to those of St. Kilda, they are plucked, or "rooed," as it is locally termed, the reason being that this is the only way of getting the finest wool, and in Shetland, where the principal industry is the manufacture of fine woollen garments, this is of the first importance. In St. Kilda nearly all the wool is converted into cloth, and as for this purpose quantity is of more importance than quality, shearing would be more profitable than "rooing." There is no reason why the St. Kildans should not rival the Shetlanders in their speciality. My sister, though a tyro in spinning, has made scarves, gloves, &c., from St. Kilda wool that might well be taken for Shetland products, and if a little more care were taken in selecting the finest parts of the wool no doubt these might be improved upon. The Shetland sheep that have been plucked look much more respectable than those of St. Kilda. The operation has to be performed at the right time and in the right way. It should be done entirely by hand, the use of a knife being as fatal to the object in view as the employment of shears.

often fail to do, or perhaps catch the wrong one. One good shepherd and a couple of well-trained sheep-dogs could do all the shepherding required infinitely better and much more expeditiously than the whole population of St. Kilda and all their dogs; but unless they could be persuaded to depute the management of the sheep to one or two individuals, who had spent some time on the mainland learning the business, I don't see what is to be done. It would be useless to give them a good dog at present; they would not know what to do with it: besides, until they give up the practice of driving the sheep over the cliffs, in their endeavour to collect them in a narrow ledge from which there is no escape, a good dog would be wasted on them. There are several large enclosures just above the village which have every appearance of having been used as "fanks," but they do not use them now because, forsooth! the walls are not high enough. One would have thought that a very moderate exercise of ingenuity would suggest the remedy to be, make them higher; but probably love of old methods prevents this, and is also responsible for their refusal to accept an offer of nets to assist them in catching their sheep.

It is pleasant to turn from the record of wasteful and foolish customs to their method of preserving the hay crop, for this has much to recommend it. They put the grass as soon as it is cut into small dome-shaped buildings called "cleits." These are built of rough stones so arranged that each layer overlaps the previous one towards the centre. Where they meet a large flag is placed over the top, and the whole covered with turf. Thus rain cannot get in, but the interstices of the stones allow air to pass freely through at the sides, and the grass which is hung up round the walls gets thoroughly dried. These cleits are dotted about all over the island. It is impossible to count them, but they are to be numbered by thousands, and though they are used for storing turf and birds as well as hay, there are many more than can possibly be required. This really seems to be an excellent way of securing the hay crop in a wet climate. It would perhaps be impracticable in the case of a heavy crop; but for small quantities it is better than the Norwegian system, and is certainly preferable to the plan adopted in other parts of the Highlands, where partially made hay is often left out for weeks until it is quite black

and the greater part of the nutritive juices have been washed out of it. I should say there is less loss in the St. Kildan method than in any other form of hay-making. The grass is not exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, it is kept in shelter from the rain, and escapes the injuries committed by the fork and rake. The only criticism I have to make is that they do not cut the grass till the end of August or the beginning of September, by which time all the grasses have run to seed ; but St. Kilda is not the only place where farmers do not know that in the process of forming seed a great part of the nutritive juices of the grass is converted into insoluble cellulose, which has practically no feeding value. It requires a considerable amount of intellect to realise that quality is better than quantity.

One of their principal industries is the manufacture of cloth. Improvements might easily be introduced in this business, but the present system does not encourage alterations. The people are credited with a definite sum for every yard of cloth they hand over to the factor, irrespective of quality ; and as it makes no difference to them whether the landlord can sell it or not, there is no inducement to adopt any improvement that might

make it more saleable. The wool of the St. Kilda sheep is most beautifully soft, and the cloth made from it is first-rate stuff. Personally I habitually wear it in the country, but many people object to it because, being made of undyed wool, it is rather



PACKING THE CLOTH

light in colour. The St. Kildans use indigo for their own clothes, in fact you hardly ever see a native wearing a suit made from the natural wool, but for export they never use any dye.¹ When they take the trouble to collect the wool from the

¹ This year they have acted on our suggestion and produced cloth of various shades of grey and brown as well as the natural colour.

Soay sheep, which is even finer and softer than the rest, they mix the brown wool with the white and produce a rather darker cloth, but they are always rather slack about getting it, and some years do not bother about it at all. The Harris tweeds are more popular, because the use of dyes introduces variety. There is no reason why the St. Kildans should not produce a similar cloth; they have crotal on the island and indigo is easily imported. They say it is expensive, but their method of using it makes it much more expensive than it need be. Instead of having a common dyeing pot for the whole island, each family dyes its wool separately, obviously a very wasteful process. If they depended for their bread and butter on the sale of their cloth, they would soon find out that they must do things as economically as possible and produce goods that the public want.

Emigration has often been suggested as a remedy for all the ills St. Kildan flesh is heir to. In the autumn of 1885, the postmen of St. Kilda, viz., the Gulf Stream and a westerly wind, delivered letters on the shores of the Long Island in which it was stated that all the crops had been destroyed by a storm and that the people were on the verge of starvation. On a relief expedition being fitted

out and sent to their rescue it was found that their condition had been very much exaggerated; that the seed for the coming year had been lost, but that there was no lack of food. However, it led to a Government inquiry, and the question was mooted whether, in view of such possibilities of famine, it would not be well to remove the people bodily from the island and give them a new home in some other part of Scotland or in the colonies. The interest aroused was so great that Mr. Connell, who went with the relief expedition on behalf of a Glasgow paper, resolved to pay a second visit to the island. He seems to have sounded the people as to their willingness to emigrate, and found that, with the exception of a few old men, they were all eager to do so. This is curious, as very few seem to have availed themselves of the opportunities offered to them; and now they seem perfectly contented with their island home and show the greatest disinclination to leave it. But what is still more curious is, that in an article written about the same time as Mr. Connell's book was published, it is stated that they were most unwilling to leave the island. The wish is father to the thought. Mr. Connell's view was that they led a miserable life, that they were periodically

in danger of starvation, that their condition was getting worse and worse every year, and that, under these circumstances, the sooner they were removed from their prison and placed on an equality with other people the better. So naturally he found that they all wished to emigrate. My view is that they lead a very happy life, that they are better housed and better fed than any other people in their rank of life, and that it would be a great misfortune to them to be removed from their present home, and, of course, I find that none of them wish to leave. I do not mean that I would discourage emigration. If any of them wish to push their fortunes in other parts of Scotland or in the colonies, by all means let them do so, and let them have every encouragement and assistance. Probably, as they become more educated, many of them will become discontented with their primitive life and wish to take a more active part in the progress of the world. All I say is that I do not believe it will add to their happiness. Theirs is indeed a happy life. They have plenty to do, but can do everything at their own time and in their own way. They have good houses, ample food, and no worries. As Martin says: "There is only

wanting to make them the happiest people in the habitable globe, viz., that they themselves do not know how happy they are."

If they were removed *en masse* and given a start in one of the colonies, or even in Skye, some would succeed, but many would fail, and it would not be a step towards the greatest happiness of the greatest number. No; I do not think an emigration scheme is what is wanted. As I said before, what I should like to see would be some plan that would tend to make them more self-



A ST. KILDAN

reliant and independent. One or two of the young men who have recently obtained situations in Glasgow have tried selling some of the produce of the island on their own account. Under the present system this is not very satisfactory, as it

means that there is a considerable temptation to send cloth to Glasgow instead of paying rent ; but if the idea could be carried further, and an emporium were to be established in the South where all the produce of the island could be sold, every member of the community making what he could from the results of his labour and paying rent to the landlord in money, it might conduce to the desired result. It would take time before they could learn to hold their own in the competition of the world, but I believe they might be successful ; though it is to be feared that all the romance would be gone from their life, and I doubt whether the spirit of good fellowship and community of interests which are now to be found amongst them would survive the trial. Theoretically I am inclined to think some such plan as this would be the best, but practically I do not think it would work unless the people themselves really wished it.

A change that would do more for the welfare and happiness of the people than anything else would be some alteration in the method of appointing the minister. I hold very strongly that a clergyman, be he Anglican, Presbyterian, Free Church, or Dissenter, will do better work if he

changes the scene of his ministrations from time to time. A new place, new people, and new interests rouse him to fresh exertions and counter-act the tendency to get into a groove, and all this applies with tenfold force to a place like St. Kilda. At present it seems to be a shelf, and not a particularly comfortable shelf. The last incumbent occupied it for twenty-five years. Mr. Fiddes, the present minister, has been there nine years. The likelihood of getting preferment from such an out-of-the-way place must be remote ; but if the authorities of the Free Church could see their way to treating it as a mission station, and send a minister, married if possible, for a term of years, I feel sure it would be better for the place and better for the minister. The desirability of having a married man is obvious. He would not be so lonely during the long months of winter, and the influence of an educated woman on the island would be most useful.

Dr. Johnson once facetiously remarked that if MacLeod let it be known what a capital prison for naughty ladies he had got, he might make his fortune. A repetition of the Lady Grange episode would hardly be feasible at the end of the nineteenth century ; but it has been suggested that

St. Kilda would be admirably suited for a convict station in the event of the present inhabitants being removed. I am not much afraid of seeing this ; and I trust that the fifty miles of Atlantic swell will always have sufficient terrors to prevent its being made use of as a health resort. It might be useful as a meteorological station, and I should not be surprised to hear that the introduction of wireless telegraphy had brought this scheme within the range of possibility.

And now, having said all I have got to say about St. Kilda, I must lay aside my pen, shut up my paint-box, and conclude with a vote of thanks to the reader who has put up with my shortcomings so long. I have done my best to give a fair picture of the lonely island and its people ; I have not slurred over their faults, but I hope I have also made clear their virtues ; I have dilated upon the charms of the scenery and the fascination of the mode of life ; but I trust that I have also laid sufficient stress upon the difficulties of getting there, and the discomforts and dangers of the place, to deter most people from going thither. I admit that this smacks rather of the dog-in-the-manger ; indeed, that is the feeling that prompted the remark. There is not room

for more than a few outsiders to enjoy themselves in St. Kilda at the same time; and as I hope to spend many more pleasant holidays in "the last of the sea-girt Hebrides," I don't want to find my happy hunting-grounds invaded by a host of Sassenachs.



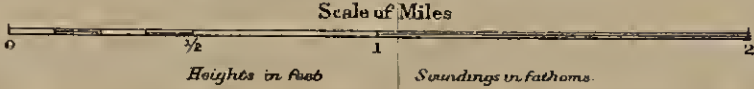
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ST KILDA

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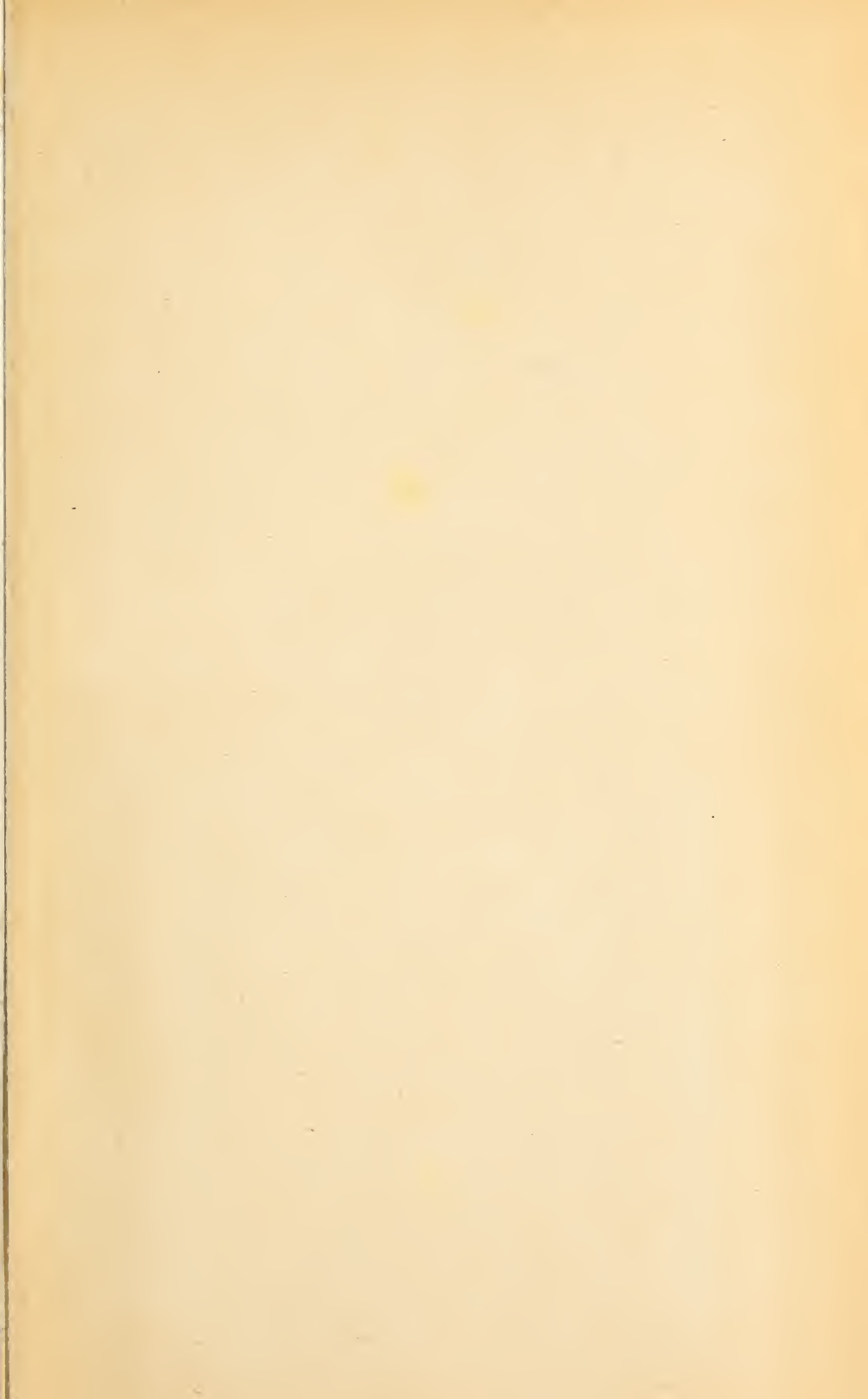
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